a Craig Rice story . . . .

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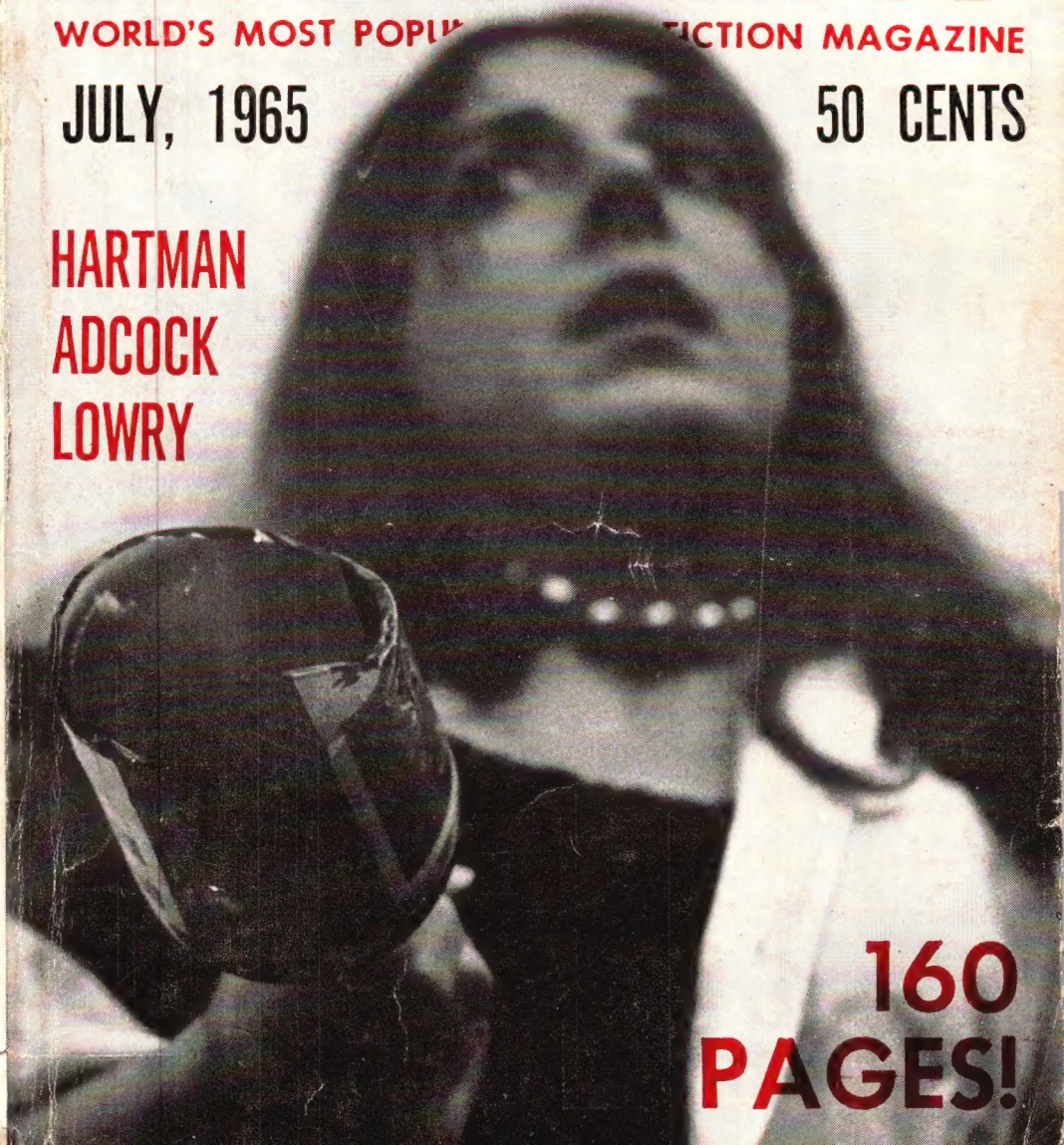

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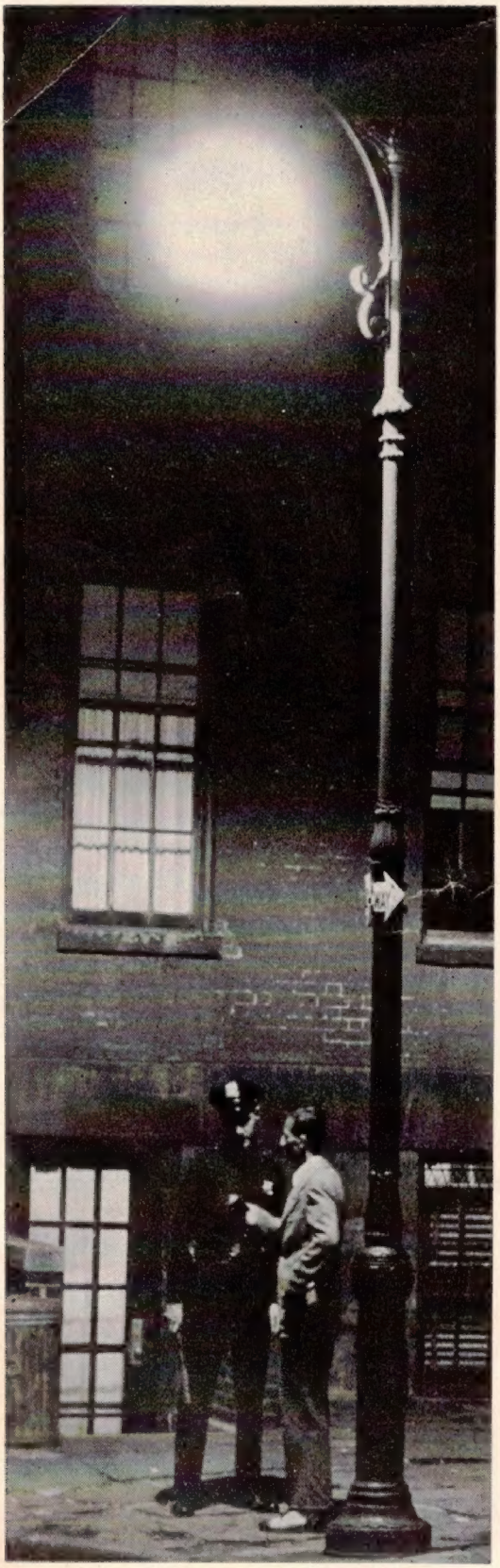

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VOL. 13, NO. 4 **MANHUNT** JULY, 1965

CONTENTS

MANHUNT CLASSIC

ALIAS: TROUBLE *by Craig Rice* 65

NOVELETTES

LOSER'S CHOICE *by Nelson Adcock* 88

THE OTHER SIDE *by Daniel De Paola* 126

SHORT STORIES

HUNT THE HUNTER *by Patrick Connolly* 2

GOING DOWN? *by Jack Ritchie* 9

MATA SEGURO *by Xavier San Luis Rey* 16

LAMSTER WAR *by Don Lowry* 30

TRAVELIN' MAN *by Rod Bryant* 45

AVERSION *by Miriam Allen DeFord* 54

TOUGH BOY *by Richard Welles* 114

NO FUTURE *by Donald Lee* 118

DOUBLE OR NOTHING *by W. Sherwood Hartman* 156

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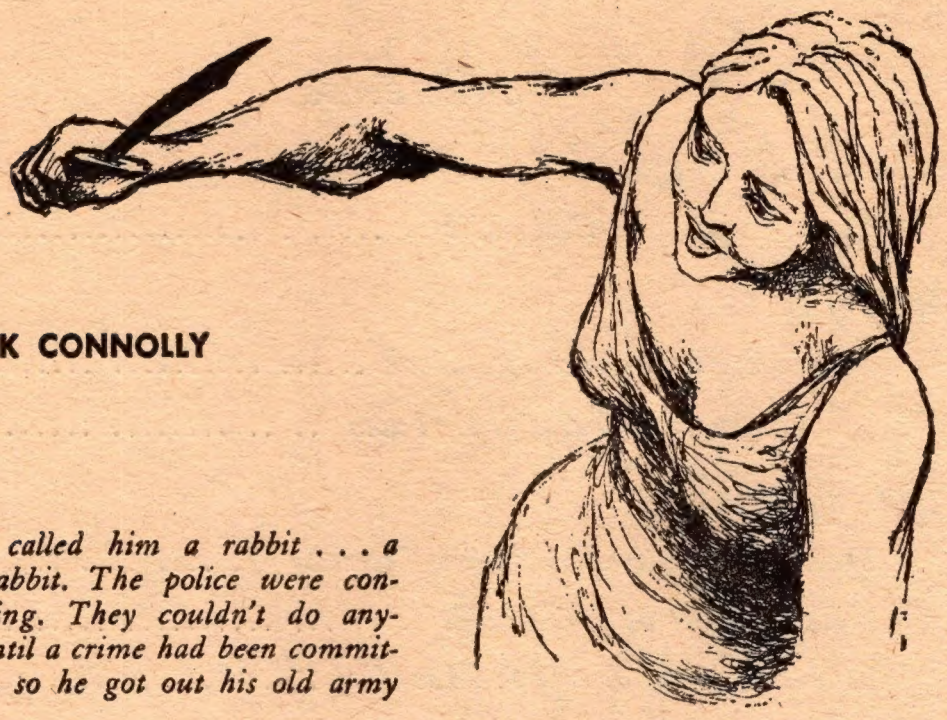
HUNT THE HUNTER



BY

PATRICK CONNOLLY

They'd called him a rabbit . . . a timid rabbit. The police were condescending. They couldn't do anything until a crime had been committed . . . so he got out his old army .45.

RALPH sat on the edge of the untidy bed studying the tremble of her superb body, the flash of her animal-green eyes as she flung clothing into the cheap tin suitcase, and he shivered from the vibrations of her hate.

"Think I'm nuts?" she said, almost smiling, as a stocking dribbled from her slender fingers into the suitcase. "So worried about my headaches, you just insisted I see a doctor. But it was to store me in that nut house . . . wasn't it? You got fooled!" She laughed her witch's laugh and clamped the suitcase shut.

That feeble old doctor had been too busy with thoughts of other patients, too busy admiring Lorraine's long slim legs to recognize her imitation of the tired suffering wife and had patted her gently and prescribed tranquilizers. No psychiatrist in this cold, isolated town.

"I'm only trying to help you, Lorraine," he said. "Your terrible moods, right from the first . . . the drinking . . . and cursing, threatening Mrs. Klein because she bought a coat similar to your's. The way you . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" She carried the suitcase high out of the bedroom

and through the cluttered living room that she had not cleaned in their six-month's marriage. She stopped at the front door of the apartment, bared her moist, too-white teeth, and then poised on high heels bending slightly forward as if she were about to pounce to where he stood in the bedroom doorway. "Think I'm nuts? Lock me up in that zoo?" Her lips twisted. "I promise you, buster, you'll pay! But first I'll have a party with Mitch . . . a hell of a party . . . always had the hots for him." She laughed. "That kind of get you? No? I've been seeing him since the first week. You mouse . . . meal-check! . . . But Mitch keeps me happy. He will help get you."

Ralph said, "Get the hell out."

She opened the door and hissed, "I'll get you. On the street . . . out of a doorway . . . here . . . in the lobby . . . somewhere, somehow I'll get a knife into those skinny ribs, you cheap, rotten, little clerk!"

"Just go," he said.

"Or maybe," and she chuckled, leaning against the half-opened door. "Yes . . . how is your precious mama and her fragile little heart?"

A bubble of fear burst in his stomach and moved upward.

Before slamming the door behind her, she said, "Don't call me, I'll call you."

And she did. The next day when he returned from his job as an accountant for an auto agency, he sat on the sofa in the living room almost relishing the calm generated by Lorraine's absence. Why had he ever married her? She had been an excitingly new cocktail waitress in town, flashing that body and the green hunger in her eyes. Lust had tortured him. He had burned. Never had he met a woman who disturbed him as she had, and he had near panicked at the thought that one of the pack that surrounded her would win the prize. But she had said that he was sweetly shy, a gentleman, not like the others. With marriage, lust quickly exhausted and disgusted him, exposing him as easy prey for her violent moods. The fever was gone.

The phone rang, and he stretched long on the sofa to answer it. "Yes?"

The throb of her drunken laughter, and then the whisper, "Think I'm nuts? Well, don't answer. I'll be around. I owe you something, remember? How is mama's beating heart? No, no, don't hang up! Someone wants to say hello."

It was Mitch's gruff voice. "Hiya, rabbit. What did you try to do to Lorraine?"

Ralph slammed the phone on its cradle. Mitch! A good companion for Lorraine. An ex-pug who had been a bum in his prime, an ex-con, five years tucked away for rape, a violent, ignorant man who was capable of any crime. Lorraine and Mitch, a sweet, danmed pair!

He sat huddled on the sofa. The late afternoon slipped into dark-

ness. He was unaware of the chill that creeped through the room, of the snowflakes clawing at the window, of the hunger grumbling in his stomach. He didn't know what to do, and he despised himself.

The phone rang, and he searched with numb fingers for it in the darkness. It rang again. He switched on the lamp and picked up the phone. "Yes," he mumbled through stiff lips.

"Oh, Ralph!" It was his mother with a hint of a sob in her voice. "What has happened? Why should Lorraine talk to me like that? I've never interfeered . . . stayed away . . ."

"She's not here, Mom. Yes, she walked out. Now, calm down. That's what she wants." His numbness evaporated. He had her to worry about. She had been hurt enough, retiring in bewilderment from his hasty marriage, stunned by Lorraine's bare hostility. "Now, get control of yourself and tell me what happened. Was she there?"

"No, she telephoned. She called you names . . . filthy names . . . and said you were going to die violently! Ralph . . . Ralph, is she crazy?"

"She's drunk . . . and, yes, she is crazy. Lock the door. Take one of those pills the doctor gave you, and I'll be there tomorrow."

"Ralph, I'm scared."

"I know. She wants that. Trust me. Nothing will happen. Have Mrs. Ryan come stay with you."

"The police, did you call the police, Ralph? Promise you will. Promise!"

"O.K. Now, get some rest. I'll see you tomorrow."

The police? Perhaps. Confidence was soothing through him as he dialed the number, but when he attempted to explain the threats—and Lorraine—to the desk sergeant, he realized how foolishly vague he sounded.

The amused voice floated back to him. "Probably had a few drinks . . . likes her booze, you say? . . . Can't make a move until she tries something. Let us know if she does."

After that, he stood in the center of the room trembling with frustration. Was he a mere rabbit? Yes, yes he was, quivering in his hole as the weasel, amused by his terror, clawed closer to the kill. "No!" he shouted aloud and angry tears stung his eyes. Why be the hunted . . . Why not the hunter? The idea pleased him. She was insane. Her threats were not idle ones.

He remembered the night she had picked up the carving knife with its worn-thin blade and traced it gently along the side of his face, not in anger, but in an hypnotic state as if gripped by a lust for the smell or taste of blood. And she had, that night, suddenly lost interest, laughed, and said, "Let's go get a drink."

It was then he had sought medical assistance for her and had failed.

Now, tonight, police protection for himself. Nothing! To hell! He would be the hunter.

His forehead beaded with wet excitement as he rummaged in the lowest dresser drawer for his old army day's .45 automatic hidden beneath the shirts. He put on his overcoat, slipped the gun into a pocket, and hurried out into the frozen night.

Snow had chased the usual pedestrians into the bars or behind the frosted windows of their homes. Main St., now, belonged to Ralph. But he watched for Lorraine, knowing her ways, knowing that snow couldn't keep her from a familiar course around the bars. She loved that booze. He peered carefully ahead, anticipating at any moment to see her sloshing along, caught momentarily by the patches of light from the store windows. Probably she would be hanging on to Mitch, laughing her witch's laugh. Ralph snuggled the gun. But could he? Could he point that weapon and send a slug ripping through that slender body? "Don't think!" he said aloud. "Just do it!" But there would be prison . . . for how long? "Don't be the rabbit!" he shouted into the snow.

He stopped beneath a broken, buzzing neon sign and stood on tiptoe to peer through a slot of the venetian blind, but the window was frosted. With cold fingers, he brushed the snow from his hair and entered the bar. He knew at a glance that she wasn't there. Only three men customers in a group sat at the bar. He knew all of them, and when he nodded in their direction, they returned a quiet, "Hi," but quickly returned their eyes to their glasses of beer. He knew in the unusual silence that he had interrupted a discussion which had concerned him. As soon as anything happened in this burg, everyone knew. He knew what they were thinking: Nice Ralph. Inoffensive Ralph. Never hurt a fly. How did he ever marry that bitch? Ralph the fool.

The thin bartender automatically set a glass of beer in front of him. "How is it going, Ralph?"

He just nodded and twisted the glass around in his hand, and then glancing up, first at the three men, then at the bartender, he said, "Lorraine been in?"

The bartender shuffled, embarrassed. "Yeah . . . earlier . . ." he giggled nervously and poked at his bow tie. "She was with Mitch. They were drunk. Maybe I shouldn't say anything, but they were giving you hell, and they sure used the telephone back there a lot."

Ralph pushed the beer away. "I'll be seeing you," he said.

The air felt fresh on his face, but his feet, immediately, began to ache with cold. He waded against a strong wind, stopping to open a bar door to peer in, then passing glittering store windows where the mannequins' poses added a weird fro-

zen touch to the empty night. He clutched his ears to relieve the sting and glared through frozen eyelashes, anticipating a glimpse of that long black hair and the cheap fur coat. He hoped to meet her on the street, in the whirling snow. It had to be done, didn't it? A car purred cautiously down the icy street. It was the city police on their lonely patrol. "Probably had a few drinks . . . Likes her booze, you say? . . . Can't make a move until she tries something."

When he reached the Elite bar, he hesitated at the door. This could be it. Had to be. He had saved the most popular spot for last. How will I do it if there is a crowd? Maybe I can lure her outside . . . drag her out . . . that damn Mitch, too, if he gets in the way. He pushed open the door and went in. It was lively. Nearly all the stools at the bar were occupied, and he could see the dancers move by the bar that led to the lounge. It appeared as if everyone in town was hiding from the storm behind the chrome, glass, and juke box.

He went directly to the telephone that hung on the wall near the entrance. When he dialed his mother's number, it was Mrs. Ryan's loud, rough voice that answered: "Is it you again, you devils? But you'll not frighten me!"

"Mrs. Ryan, it's me, Ralph. Is my mother alright?"

"Ralph? Oh, you are the fine son. I've been trying and trying to get you. Are you in some joint? I hear music."

"My mother . . ."

"Poor sweet soul. The ambulance just toted her away and not to the hospital. And you, where were you? She's dead, poor thing. Her with that weak heart, just frightened to death. Oh, yes, those were the doctor's words. I got him, but too late. And you . . ."

"Mrs. Ryan, what happened?"

"It was the phone! She had me over, poor thing, and then the phone rang. Not a word did she say, just listening, and as white as a sheet, and she took this fit of coughing. I grabbed the phone, and there was nothing but this laughing. Drunk! A man and a woman, mind you. Devils, I said. Devils from hell . . ."

"Goodnight, Mrs. Ryan."

When he replaced the telephone, he was as cold as if he stood outside in the blast of winter. His mother. He studied the drinkers at the bar, but no Lorraine. Perhaps she was back in the lounge dragging around the dance floor with Mitch in her lazy fashion. He went to the end of the bar and waited for Carl to serve him a beer. When he did, Ralph said, "A shot, too. It's cold out there."

"Your nose is brilliant," Carl said, pouring the whiskey. Then he looked directly at Ralph. "Lorraine was in with Mitch. Real wild, both drunk, and giving you hell. Bragging how they would get you. Then

Mitch dances with Gertie Landon, and Lorraine takes off raising hell. Mitch is still back there. Some night!"

"Yeah?" Ralph said. He gulped his whiskey and then sipped the beer as Carl hurried to a call at the other end of the bar. He caught a glimpse of Mitch as he staggered by the dance floor entrance—the tall, bulky body, the uncombed hair.

But time was creeping away. His wandering frozen search had consumed all the evening and part of the night. It would soon be two a.m., and all the bars would close. Where had Lorraine gone? Would she be back for Mitch? The loud music pressed on his ears, and the rattle of ice, chatter, nervous laughter began to annoy him. He was too warm, now, in his overcoat, but he didn't want to take it off. The revolver sagging in his pocket reminded him to find Lorraine.

The bar phone rang, and Carl answered. "Just a minute," he said, and whispered to Ralph, "It's Lorraine. Wants to speak to Mitch."

"I'll take it on the wall phone," Ralph said.

"You know what you are doing, Ralph?"

But he was already at the extension. He covered the mouthpiece with his handkerchief and then grunted, "Yeah."

"You pig, Mitch." Her familiar voice grated on his ear. "Are you with that bitch, Gertie, while I rot at your place?"

"Yeah," and Ralph slammed the phone hard on its hook. Excitement broke the ice inside of him. His hand quivered when he pressed it to his lips. This hunt, this game, had fascinating variations. There was more than one way to destroy a beast. He went back to the bar and ordered another shot. This he sipped, savoring the tingle in his stomach.

Then Mitch, head hanging, unseeing, almost touching Ralph, stumbled toward the bar's front door, almost falling as he staggered out, alone. Ralph nursed his whiskey, swishing it around in his mouth. Now, the clock moved slowly, and Ralph began to fidget, drumming his fingers gently on the bar. But two o'clock did come, and he tightened the collar of his coat and walked out into the night.

The storm had passed. The sky was clear, but the cold cut bitterly at his ears. The snow was crisp beneath his feet, and his breath gushed in pale streams around his nose. For a moment he stomped his feet, gazing up and down the street. Then he cut across the deep snow of a parking lot, then the short cut through the new housing project. He knew where Mitch lived. He trotted the last two blocks, cupping his hand over his cold ears, and the revolver thumped, thumped against his leg.

When he reached the shambles of a white house, he slowed down to a walk and moved cautiously to the

alley where Mitch lived in an apartment over the garage. He paused at the steep wooden steps. Thick tracks staggered through the snow up to the landing. Ralph took the revolver from his pocket, but the cold air stuck it to his hand. He shoved it back into the warmth of his pocket. He put his weight on the first step, but it squeaked. He paused. He took the next three steps quickly, then, breathing heavily, he leaned on the railing, staring up at the landing, but he could not see a light. Then, one by one, he climbed to the top. He felt for the doorknob, and his eyes picked out a sliver of light. The door was slightly open. He stood there, the crisp snow complaining beneath his feet, and he strained to hear. A radio played very softly. And then he heard words, but he couldn't distinguish them. His hand scraped the doorknob, and he pushed gently, but the door stuck to the swelling of the floor. He pushed harder, and the door scraped open enough for him to slip through. Then, inside the darkened room, he leaned heavily against the door, and it scraped shut. The noise made his hands tremble.

A slice of light from a partially open bedroom door caught his eye. He could hear words again, but some were smothered by the radio's music. They were tired, flat words. "Get up, Mitch. Stop fooling. Stop teasing, Mitch. I don't care about that slut." Ralph moved slowly toward the light and the voice.

She sat in her dirty pink slip on the grey of an unmade bed with her back to him. Her long dark hair hung loose around her shoulders. He stood staring at her back, and then, head down, she twisted, and through a strand of dark hair looked at him with unseeing, glazed eyes.

"Tell him to get up." It was a whine. "Tell him I was kidding. Who cares about that damn Gertie?"

Ralph walked around the bed, stumbled on a bottle, and then looked down at the sliced mess that had been Mitch. The knife lay carelessly by the body, and the stench of spilled whiskey mingling with blood pushed Ralph backwards into the other room. He switched on the light and found the phone, smeared with jam, on a littered kitchen table. It would be easy to explain his presence: He had come to persuade his wife to come home and had found this. Ah! This glow of the successful hunt as the captured trophy hovered in the next room over the butchered bait.

"Tell him to get up." This time, almost a snarl.

"Don't fret," he said as he dialed. "Your cage will soon be ready."

GOING DOWN ?

He was an unusual cop. His power of persuasion was enormous.

BY
JACK RITCHIE

SEVERAL floors below me, firemen were stringing up a safety net.

Sergeant Morgan had eased himself out on the ledge too and now he stood up. "It's a long way down, mister. When you land you'll be nothing but a wide mess."

"The configuration of my remains does not concern me at the moment," I said coldly.

It was evidently part of the sergeant's job to keep me talking. "What's so bad that you think you can solve it by jumping?"

"Nothing specific," I said. "It is simply that the sum total of existence is impossible to bear. I am Everyman and Everyman is a failure."

He took a well-worn cigar stub out of his mouth. "Look, I don't go for this Everyman jazz. You got trouble with your wife? What would she think about you doing this?"

"I rather suspect that she would encourage me to take one or two steps forward."

Morgan listened for a few seconds to someone leaning out of the window behind him and then spoke to me again. "You're registered as Amos Dawson?"

"Yes. However don't bother asking me for my actual name."

He worried the cigar. "You got children, ain't you? What would they think if they seen you up here?"

"I have one son and he is a disappointment. He became a pharmacist."

"You got to learn to take the good with the bad," Morgan said. "Like I wanted my boy to be on the force, but it didn't work out."

"I suppose your father was a policeman?" I asked acidly. "And his father before him?"

"Well, no," Sergeant Morgan said "But you got to start a tradition somewhere. Lance is a carburetor man at Len's Auto Service."

"Lance?"

Morgan shrugged. "I didn't have nothing to do with that. The name was my wife's idea." He began searching through his pockets. "You don't happen to have any Tums on you?"

"No."

He sighed. "I'll bet it's mostly wife troubles bothering you? That right? You don't get along now? But remember, she was the girl that you was in love with when you got married."

"She was?"

"Sure," Morgan said. "Why else did you marry her?"

"Fatal propinquity."

"Now take my case," Morgan said. "She was the girl next door. Weighed in at one-twenty." He thought about that. "You could double that now easy."

I had chosen the side of the building sheltered from the wind and normal conversation was possible. "Everyman is born and doomed to failure," I said. "The sooner he realizes that and defies fate and the universe by a positive-negative action, the better. . . ."

"So things didn't work out," Morgan said. "But life's still worth living."

"Why?"

"Well. . . ." He rubbed his jaw. "If it weren't, then why do people keep on living?"

"Because they are either idiots or cowards afraid of death."

He looked me over. "You wouldn't put yourself in the idiot class, would you?"

"Of course not," I said coolly.

He nodded. "So then if you lived all these years only because you're a coward, I'd think that by now you'd be used to it?"

I thought the sergeant's face seemed rather gray. "Do heights bother you?" I asked a trifle maliciously.

He shook his head. "Not especially. It's my insides. What the fumes done."

"What fumes?"

"Auto fumes. I directed traffic on Third and Wisconsin for seventeen years and then the department medics decided I ought to transfer. So now I'm in bunco."

"Really? And the police sent *you* up here to talk to me?"

"Nobody sent me," Morgan said. "I just happened to be walking to the subway minding my own business when I looked up and seen you. So I rushed up here and started talking. And now nobody inside wants to relieve me. They say they don't want to change horses in mid-stream. But personally I think they're just afraid you'll jump on their time and it might look bad in the newspapers."

He glanced down at the stalled traffic. "See that big truck over there? Looks like you're on television." He exhaled wearily. "That's where I should be now. At home watching this on TV." His face became pensive. "In the old days I could sit in front of TV with a case of beer and watch the ball games all afternoon. But now one bottle makes me sick as a dog. The fumes, you know."

I sincerely wished someone else had arrived here first. "Very well, so you can't drink beer. I'm sure you've managed to fill in your time with something else."

Morgan shook his head. "It was the only hobby I had. Television just ain't the same."

I gazed out into space. "If Everyman is to be more than simply a compliant mote in this universe, then he must. . . ."

"There's one thing I got no trouble with, though," Morgan said. "My ears."

"I wasn't aware that *I* was shouting."

"Not you. My wife. I could use a little deafness around the house, but in the ears I got twenty-twenty."

"Women feel unfullfilled unless they are making noise," I said. "Basically it is their desire to be noticed, to be want . . ."

A suspicion descended upon me. Was Morgan engaged in the stratagem of pretending that his miserable cares were important in order to belittle my own? I smiled firmly. "Now concerning my son. My family has been Liberal Arts for generations. We did not even *speak* to anyone with a B.S. And when my son blithely announces that he has registered in . . ."

"My boy didn't even make it through high school," Morgan said. "And the parole board got him the job with Len's Auto Service."

I still smiled. "My wife absolutely hates me."

He brushed that aside. "Hate? My wife saves it up all day and hits me with it at supper. Ever since I told her the boy was no good and that was ten years ago."

I invented a progeny. "My granddaughter got a D in spelling."

He trumped. "*My* granddaughter failed the first grade. She's got to take the whole thing over and she's eight already."

I folded my arms. "The roof of my house leaks."

He was still with me. "We're living in a three-room apartment and my mother-in-law's the landlord."

That did it. "See here," I said. "It is quite evident that you have completely rejected my Everyman motive for departing this world and prefer to think in terms of family trouble. So be it. However I must warn you that I am quite aware of your attempts to minimize my difficulties by creating imaginary ones of your own."

Morgan had large blue eyes. "Huh?"

"My dear man," I said. "If all you say is true—if you are plagued with the fumes and eternally deprived of the creature comfort of beer—if you have a corpulent, nagging, shrill, hating wife—if you have a delinquent son, a moronic granddaughter, and a mother-in-law for a landlord, then I submit to you that you are one of the most miserable creatures in existence. And that being the case, why are you standing here gabbling like an old woman? I see absolutely no reason why *you* shouldn't step off this ledge. Why don't *you* jump!"

Morgan stared at me.

"And furthermore," I said. "If we should delve into your intellect, I'm sure that . . ." I stopped and watched him uneasily.

Morgan's face was white and he stared down at the street. He teetered.

My eyes widened. "Now, just one minute . . . !"

But Sergeant Morgan had stepped off the ledge into space.

The psychiatrist and I had an enjoyable two hours of conversation before a police lieutenant entered the room to interrupt us.

He put the facts on the line. "We've been checking up on you. You pulled this same stunt in Chicago, in St. Louis, and now here. What's the matter, you an exhibitionist, or something?"

"I am *not* an exhibitionist. I approached every ledge with the utmost sincerity. I merely lost my nerve at the last moment."

The psychiatrist was understanding. "However you have definitely decided that never, never again will you consider taking your life?"

"Absolutely never," I said firmly. "When I saw Sergeant Morgan step . . . slip off that ledge, I suddenly realized that perhaps inhaling and exhaling still had their virtues." I

sighed to prove it. "By the way, how is Sergeant Morgan?"

"He got a few rope burns from the safety net," the lieutenant said. "But otherwise he's okay. Except maybe for a little shock. Keeps babbling about how good it is to be alive."

I agreed. "No matter how bitter life is, it is still worth living." And that reminded me of something. I removed thirty cents from my wallet and handed it to the lieutenant. "The next time you see the sergeant, would you please present him with a pack of Tums. My compliments."

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MATA SEGURO

BY

XAVIER SAN LUIS REY

Mata seguro *means* certain death *in Spanish. And it's a generally accepted fact that death is certain. However . . . in Cuba they tend to press the point.*

CAPITAN Manolo Alvarez of Habana's Policia National, Jefe of the notorious Third Precinct Station and the most hated hombre in the Barrio Colon, sat behind his desk smoothing the hairs of his mustache as he listened quietly to the complaint being read by his clerk charging the prisoner who sat before them with the illegal possession of dangerous explosives. The man in question, a thin, grey-haired old man with a woeful expression on his face, was dressed in a shabby suit, grimy shirt, and worn, scuffed shoes. His hands were handcuffed and resting on his knees.

By the prisoner's side stood a tall,

muscular policeman whose folded arms cradled a nite-stick. Near the door another policeman sat in a chair inclined against the wall. He was dozing, but his hands still maintained a firm grip on the submachine gun resting on his lap.

The Capitan was corpulent and swarthy of complexion and had sly oriental eyes set in a broad round face. A former bartender, the Capitan had been a policia for fifteen years. Promoted rapidly to the ranks of officialdom because of his strong political connections, the Capitan had no real qualifications to justify his placement in such an important post, but he was a disciplined and shrewd police officer in spite of his mania for cruelty and viciousness and never failed to protect the interests of the government which was the main concern of any individual accepting such a job.

Loosening his tie when the clerk finished reading the complaint, the Capitan swung his chair and turned his back on the prisoner and studied the large oil-painting of the Presidente de la Republica that hung on the wall. "What is your full, legal name?" he asked, and folded his hands on the mound that was his belly and closed his eyes.

"My name is Rudolpho Torres de Castillo," replied the old man. He leaned forward a little and smiled meekly. "And if I may say so, mi Capitan, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

The policeman beside the prisoner bent down and tapped the anciano on the shoulder. "You will say Sir or Senor when addressing the Capitan," he said. "It would be wise not to forget this."

"Occupation?" the Capitan asked.

"I am a lawyer, Senor. Retired."

"Where do you live?"

"On Consulado street, Senor. Number two twenty one."

"Is that not the location of a flophouse?"

"The number designates a hotel for single men, Senor."

"What do they call this flophouse?"

"The El Faro, Senor."

"Meaning lighthouse, or haven for criminals, no?"

"Since I have never found it necessary to acquaint myself with the pursuits of my neighbors I cannot say, Senor."

"Do many people live there?"

"I have been told that the El Faro contains one hundred and seventeen rooms, Senor."

"How much money do they charge transients for a room?"

"Sixty cents a day, Senor."

The Capitan sniffed. "You do not live in a very reputable place. The El Faro is the most miserable posada in the neighborhood."

"It is all I can afford, Senor."

"What do you do for a living?"

"Since my pension was discontinued I have dedicated myself to selling toys on Galiano street, Senor."

The Capitan shoved the wall

with his foot and swung his chair about and faced the old man, his hands still folded over his belly. "Do you deny you have a criminal record?"

"No, Senor."

"When my men arrested you they discovered you in the darkened hallway of a house on the Malecon, may I ask what you were doing there, Mr. Castillo?"

"Nothing harmful, I assure you, Senor."

"Were you planning to leave a bomb there?"

"No, Senor. You see, I could not sleep and decided to leave my room and go for a stroll and then, well, the urge was so great . . ." He paused. "Begging the Capitan's pardon, I had to urinate and there was no other secluded place on hand so I, well . . ."

"Pig!"

The old man bowed his head. "I'm terribly sorry, Senor."

"Are you accustomed to urinating in the hallways of other people's houses? Do you do this often?"

"I assure you, Senor. My personal habits are above reproach, but in this case it was an emergency."

"You admit you have a criminal record, is that correct?"

"Si, Senor."

"Do you also admit murdering a man in the year 1932?"

"No, Senor. I killed a man, yes. But merely as an act of self defense. During an argument this person attacked me with a knife and while we struggled I managed to take the knife away from him and, well, in the heat and ire of the moment I plunged it into his chest. I was completely acquitted of any crime at the trial that followed."

"Was not your victim a prominent politico of the era?"

"Si, Senor. He was a Representante."

"Did the fact that you were a reputable lawyer of the era influence your acquittal?"

"The only influence brought to bear in the case in question were the pertinent and true facts, Senor, and these demanded that I be acquitted."

The Capitan leaned forward on the desk. "I'm glad you mentioned facts, Senor Castillo. As a police officer I am very much interested in facts, and while I have no real interest in your past crime whatsoever I am determined to investigate your present one, and to do so I must have facts. True facts. Not lies, mind you. I say facts. True facts." The Capitan leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over his belly. "In order to get facts to aid an investigation I sometimes find myself compelled to employ any one of several methods." He shrugged his shoulders. "If the criminal is cooperative I merely question him and he supplies the true answers which of course I always know from the start. That is what I call the simple method. The

persuasive method involves tying the criminal across a desk, dropping his pants and beating his buttocks with a rubber hose until he begs to tell the truth. Would you like to be beaten with a rubber hose, Senor Castillo?"

The old man blinked and fidgeted nervously in his chair. "Of course not, mi Capitan." He raised his manacled hands. "I assure you, Senor. Before you sits an honest man."

"Perhaps. But will he prove himself a cooperative one?"

The old man nodded. "I intend to tell the truth."

"Good, good," the Capitan said. "Now, tell me, Senor Castillo, were you ever confined in Mazorra, the crazy house?"

"Si, Senor."

"Were you actually, eh," the Capitan made a circling motion with his index finger at the side of his head, "loco?"

"No, Senor."

"What circumstances prompted the courts to send you to Mazorra?"

"I attempted to kill my wife."

"Ah! So you attempted to kill your wife? Hmm. I see. And the man you murdered, did he author the motive?"

"He was her clandestine lover, Senor."

"You were acquitted on both counts?"

"Yes. On a plea of temporary insanity." The policeman beside the old man leaned down and tapped him on the shoulder. "You will say Sir or Senor when addressing the Capitan. Do not forget this, please."

The old man bowed his head. "I'm sorry. I will not forget again."

"In what manner did you attempt to kill your wife?" the Capitan asked. "Did you employ a gun, poison, knife?"

"I threw acid in her face, Senor."

"I see. And when you were released from Mazorra, you were given a clean bill of health?"

"Si, Senor."

"You are not, eh, sick at the moment?"

"No, Senor."

"How long were you confined in Mazorra?"

"For three years, Senor."

"How old are you, Senor Castillo?"

"I am sixty seven years old, Senor."

"According to the record you were a rather famous lawyer. Where did you receive your education?"

"At the Universidad de Habana, but principally in Europe."

"Your family, they were people of means?"

"Si, Senor."

"Do you have any living relatives?"

"No, Senor."

"What happened to your family's fortune?"

"It was swindled from me by different groups in the Machado government."

"Is it true that you speak several languages?"

"Si, Senor. Spanish, English and German."

"Obviously you are a well educated man, Senor Castillo, a man of commendable background and culture and so forth. Or at least anyone would have thought so before your troubles began. Now, today, you sell toys on Galiano street like a common person, live in a flophouse, and endulge such vulgar practices as urinating in the hallways of other people's houses. I note in your record that you also are an alcoholic. Is this true?"

"I would not think so, Senor."

"The record states that you have been arrested for drunkenness and vagrancy some thirty six times. In addition, the record states that you are addicted to drinking a foul brew commonly known as sweet dreams, which consists of ninety percent rubbing alcohol, lemon juice, and sugar. Is a man who consumes such potent highballs not an alcoholic?"

"No, Senor."

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "When I have money I usually drink Pedro Domeque. I do not drink sweet dreams all the time."

"I see." The Capitan paused. "Have you ever studied medicine, chemistry, or pharmacy?"

"No, Senor."

"Tell me, do you by any chance know the composition of a drug or poison called Mata Seguro?"

"Si, Senor."

"I have been informed it is very rare. How did you acquire knowledge of this poison?"

"From a German seaman I chanced to meet one night on the waterfront. During the war he had been a secret service agent, or so he informed me, and he had received instruction in the use of this poison as part of his training."

"Did he by any chance explain its formula to you?"

"He told me it had none, Senor."

The Capitan blinked. "What? All poisons have formulas. What is it made of?"

The clerk raised his hand. "If it please the Capitan, may I offer a word?"

"What is on your mind, Osvaldo?"

"I don't believe Senor Castillo could explain the poison's formula even if he did know it, mi Capitan. The technical terms for the ingredients that might be used in mixing a drug or poison are generally very complicated, and I think are explained with symbols and numbers rather than with words. However, if Senor Castillo could remember the actual name of the drug in question perhaps our laboratory might be able to furnish information on it."

The Capitan turned to the old man. "Do you know the technical name of this poison, Senor?"

"The seaman mentioned it to me, but I have forgotten it." The old

man frowned. "It was the type of name disguised in Latin that one does not remember easily."

"Perhaps the rubber hose will refresh your memory?"

The old man raised his manacled hands. "Wait, do not be angry with me, Senor. Please understand I was very drunk the night I met this seaman and the name of the drug did not interest me at the time. However, I do recall many of the things he had to say about it and I can advise you that Mata Seguro is not a poison, it is a serum."

The Capitan fell back in his chair. "Ah, a serum."

"Si, Senor. A bacteriological serum is enough to kill a score of men without leaving any trace to indicate the cause of death. The serum normally takes effect within twelve minutes after being administered. It is extremely dangerous inasmuch as it does not lose any of its lethal quality even when it dries. If you were to place a drop in a glass, for example, and permitted it to dry and someone were to pour water or some other liquid into that glass and drink from it, he would be dead within a brief lapse of time."

"Amazing!" said the Capitan.

"It is quite remarkable, Senor."

"How do you know this poison is as potent as the German claimed?" Osvaldo asked. "Have you put it to the test?"

"Many times," the old man said. "To date I have fed it to a score of canines, mostly those sickly mongrels that infest our streets, and I can assure you that they were dead before ten minutes had been marked by the clock."

The Capian nodded. "Hmm. Very interesting." He folded his hands on his belly again. "Tell me, Senor Castillo, have you been aware of my men following you about the city for the past two weeks?"

"Si, Senor, and of course I realized their interest in me had something to do with the serum. You see, your men began shadowing me the day after I very foolishly discussed the poison with a stranger I met in the Pilot's bar on the waterfront. I am certain he was a policia, a member of your own secret service. You see, during our conversation I referred to the serum as Mata Seguro, which means certain death, and of course this is an invention known only to me. Since you immediately referred to the serum by the name I, myself, gave it, then only your agent could have described it to you as such."

"Have you ever used this poison to dispatch anyone?"

"No, Senor. Never."

"Do you still have the poison in your possession?"

"I have several bottles in my room, Senor."

"Why is it that my men did not find these bottles when they searched your quarters, Senor Castillo? Where are they hidden?"

"In the wall, Senor."

"How much poison does each bottle contain?"

"Exactly fifty cubic centimeters, Senor."

"Is this poison tasteless?"

"Both tasteless and colorless, Senor."

"Is it infallible?"

"I would say so, yes."

"How many bottles do you have, Senor Castillo?"

"Three, Senor."

"Tell me, Senor Castillo, if the contents of these bottles were emptied in the city's reservoir, what do you think would happen?"

The old man stroked his chin with his manacled hands and thought a moment, then he said: "A terrible plague could overtake the city, but it is possible that the volume of water would be so much greater than the quantity of serum that it would have no effect at all."

"And a few drops placed in a cauldron of soup?"

The old man caught the implication. "The regiment of soldiers who drank of it would be dead before they left the dinner table."

Osvaldo stirred. "What was your motive in safeguarding these bottles, Senor Castillo?"

"As curiosities, Senor. Or perhaps because of the profound feeling of power they gave me. It shames me to admit it, Senor, but there were times when I felt not unlike a God with these bottles in my possession, since I held the decision of life and death over everyone who came in contact with me. A drop placed on my finger, for example, and left to dry and later dipped into the glass of a person drinking at my side in a bar, would have rendered him irrevocably dead. I could have visited restaurants, soda bottling plants, breweries, and brought the population of Habana falling to its knees. All these hidious thoughts, I must confess, passed through my mind at one time or another, but fortunately I am a patriota and love my country and my people and do not have any living enemies. I can think of no other reason for my keeping such dangerous objects."

"You honestly did not intend to harm anyone?"

"No, Senor."

"Why did you not bring these bottles to the police?" the Capitan asked.

"I was afraid of being arrested, Senor."

"Tell me, Senor Castillo," Osvaldo said. "Do you sympathize with the cause of Doctor Fidel Castro?"

"No, Senor. I am a patriota and a Batistiano."

"I see."

"Why did the German give you the poison?" the Capitan asked.

"He offered them to me in exchange for two bottles of Palmita ron. He was penniless at the time and I had a few pesos."

"Did he mention whether he had more?"

"At the time he had a small case containing fifty bottles."

"Were the bottles very large?"

"No, Senor. He carried the fifty bottles in a small case that was no larger than a shoe box."

"Did the German mention what he planned to do with the serum?"

"Si, Senor. Since he was drunk he spoke quite freely."

"And?"

"Thirty were to be delivered to a contact in the Dominican Republic and twenty were destined to a contact here in Habana."

The Capitan sat up stiffly. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "So!" He turned abruptly to Osvaldo. "Are you taking down all this information?"

"Every last word, mi Capitan."

"Good," said the Capitan. "Later I want you to make up a formal report on this matter in sufficient copies to send one each to all the Jefes of the security and Armed Forces departments of the government. Then I want you to contact General Rodillas of the Army, Commandante Malas Encantidades of the Jefatura of the Policia Nacional, Commandante Medeben la Cintura of Military Intelligence and Commandante Volando sin Querrer, the President's confident. I want you to arrange a conference with these dignitaries for ten o'clock this evening. Stamp the report Top Secret and inform the different parties that I have a matter of the utmost urgency to discuss with them. Is that understood?"

"Si, mi Capitan."

The Capitan passed his thumb and index finger over his mustache. "I think our friend Trujillo is up to something nasty the President should know about," he said reflectively. "I wonder what this evil plot can be?" He looked up at the old man. "What did this German call himself?"

"Eric, Senor. Eric Knudson."

"Did he mention when he would return to Habana?"

"During his visit he informed me that he was leaving the merchant marine service," the old man said. "He told me he was tired of the sea and planned to buy some land in Australia with the money he expected to receive for the delivery of the serum. He planned to get married and become a farmer. That was what he told me. He said that when he arrived in the Dominican Republic and delivered his merchandise he would take a plane for Miami and there board a flight to the coast and later board another one for Sydney."

"What was the name of his ship?"

"The Hellena, Senor."

"When did you see him last?"

"Approximately two weeks ago, Senor."

"I see." The Capitan motioned to the policeman at the old man's side. "Manuel, do you know the location of this flophouse on Consulado street?"

"Si, mi Capitan."

"Good. Go there with a couple of men and search Senor Castillo's

room. Bring me any papers, documents, letters, or suspicious objects or articles you may find. Also, be sure to bring those bottles of poison that are hidden there." He looked at the old man. "Where are they hidden exactly, Senor Castillo?"

"In the wall at the foot of the bed, Senor. If you tear out the section that appears to have been recently plastered you will find them."

"I need not caution you about handling these bottles, Manuel," the Capitan said. "They contain something deadlier than dynamite. When you finish, report back to me."

The policeman clicked his heels and saluted smartly. "Muy bien, mi Capitan," he said, and turned and left the room.

"You need not have any fear the bottles will break, Senor," the old man said. "They are fully protected against shock or breakage by a rubber lining an eighth of an inch thick and this is enclosed in a steel casing. They are hermetically sealed and have safety catches to prevent their opening accidently."

"Very interesting," said the Capitan. "Tell me, Senor Castillo, in your opinion, would you say these bottles were designed by an expert?"

"The fact is obvious, Senor."

"Would you opinion their manufacture to be an expensive process?"

"Extremely so, Senor."

"And the buyers purpose?"

"Something fiendishly diabolical, Senor."

"Mass murder, perhaps?"

"The quantity delivered implies as much."

"Do you realize what will happen to you if you have lied to me, Senor Castillo?"

"Of course. But I have spoken only the truth."

"Good," said the Capitan. "I will accept your word as a gentleman, for the time being, but if you have lied to me I will break your bones like a criminal. Now tell me, Senor Castillo, did the German mention his contact here in Habana?"

"Si, Senor. The name he mentioned was Reynardo Lopez. They were to meet that morning in a bar in the Vedado called Hernando's Hideaway."

The Capitan was shocked. "Lopez you say?"

"Si, Senor."

The Capitan turned abruptly to the clerk. "Osveldo, could this man Lopez be the same Lopez I'm thinking about at the moment?"

"Indeed it is, mi Capitan," replied the clerk. "He is Senador Melayo Suervo's bodyguard and chauffeur."

"Ah! You mean the Presidente's most hated enemy, of course."

"The Capitan must be joking," said the clerk. "There is but one Melayo Suervo in Habana. The Capitan knows as well as I do that the Presidente has placed him on the black list."

"So the cat is out of the bag," the Capitan said.

"Si," said the clerk. "Along with three little kittens."

"When is the Senador scheduled to be eliminated?"

"On Saturday, mi Capitan. After the banquet the Senador has planned in the Presidente's honor."

"Good lord!" exclaimed the Capitan.

"Yes," nodded the clerk. "Obviously the Senador is not content with merely being a despicable sympathizer to the rebel cause and instigating attacks against our wonderful Presidente, such as the attack on the presidential palace. Now he has designs on poisoning the Presidente himself."

"Is my name on the guest list?" the Capitan asked fearfully.

"Si. Your wife's name, too."

The Capitan scowled. "The filthy swine!" he muttered darkly. "And to think I considered him a man of scruples."

"Obviously he plans to make a clean sweep with his dinner," the clerk said. "Do you realize he has invited the most prominent members of the Presidente's cabinet? If I may say so, Senor, the uncovering of this plot should win you the undying gratitude of all those people, not to mention the eternal good will and friendship of the Presidente. Of course you will receive a nice fat promotion. May I be the first to congratulate you?"

The Capitan stroked his chin, deep in thought. "Something must be done tonight, Osvaldo."

"May I suggest a course, Senor?"

"What do you have in mind, Osvaldo?"

"Albino, Senor."

"Albino?"

"Si, Senor. He's here. Outside."

The Capitan made a slicing motion across his throat. "Do you mean . . ."

"The Senador was scheduled to die anyway, Senor."

"Yes, but in a dignified way." He paused. "Very well. Show him in. I do not like the sadistic bastard, but under the circumstances . . ."

"Albino will do a perfect job, Senor. Have no fear on that account. It has always been my personal belief that Albino is the most gifted assassin in the country. Do you recall the Marcelino killing? That was a splendid piece of work. Albino got rid of the body by burying it in quick lime."

"Yes, but first he dismembered the arms and legs and head from the torso," the Capitan said. "Albino is a positive ghoul."

"But effective," said the clerk.

"Show him in," the Capitan said. "We're wasting time."

The clerk called to the policeman at the door. "Oye, Felipe. Get your lazy ass up from that stool and tell Albino the Capitan wants to see him on a matter of the most urgent importance. Please be quick."

The policeman, who had been startled into wakefulness, stretched his arms, yawned widely, picked up his weapon and slowly pushed

open the door with his foot and left the office, scratching his behind.

The old man stirred. "Would you be good enough to remove these handcuffs?" he asked the Capitan, displaying his manacled hands. "They are locked very tight and hurt my wrists."

"You are a prisoner, Senor Castillo," the Capitan said. "The handcuffs will remain as they are until you are delivered to the authorities at Principe Prison."

"Do you intend to pursue the charge of urinating in a hallway?" the old man asked.

"The charge doesn't read as simple as that," the clerk said.

"What other offense can you charge me with?"

"As a lawyer you should be able to guess, Senor Castillo."

The manacled wrists fell on the old man's knees. "Yes, I suppose I should," he said. He sighed heavily. "I assume I will be charged with conspiring against the Presidente's life?"

"Amongst other things, yes," said the Capitan. "Remember, we still haven't discussed the problem of the stick of dynamite that was found on your person when my men arrested you. For that alone, Senor Castillo, you can be charged with terrorism."

"I feared as much," the old man said.

"Did you expect a medal?" the clerk said.

"Take Senor Castillo to the detention pen and lock him up," the Capitan said. "I'll continue questioning him later."

The clerk tapped the old man on the shoulder. "On your feet, Senor."

As they left the office Albino entered the room and the corpulent policeman once again sat in his chair and rested his sub-machine gun across his lap. "You asked to see me, Capitan?" Albino said. He was a young man, perhaps twenty-four or five years old, blond-headed, blue-eyed, and dressed in an expensive, well-tailored suit. On his head he wore a blue straw hippy with a yellow feather stuck in the band.

"Sit down, please," the Capitan said.

Albino hesitated, one hand outstretched. "If it please the Capitan," he said, smiling. "I would prefer to stand. You see, the crease in my trousers . . ."

The Capitan frowned. "As you wish."

"You have an important job for me?" Albino asked.

"Yes. A very special job."

"Does the Capitan realize I am not attached to this precinct and under no obligation to its Jefe?"

"I am fully aware of that fact."

"Does Commandante Cintura know of this job?"

"It has been unanimously approved by all the Jefes of the security council."

Very well."

"As I mentioned before, Albino, this is a very special job."

Albino smiled. "Not the Presidente, I hope. . . ."

The Capitan scowled. "I would advise you to watch your manners in my presence," he said coldly.

Albino shrugged. "Sure, sure. Okey. Don't get excited, mi Capitan. I am only making a joke."

"Do you know this former Senador called Suervo?" the Capitan said.

"I have met him several times."

"Do vou know the location of his residence?"

"Si. It is in Marianao."

The Capitan swung his chair about and folded his hands over his belly and stared at the oil painting of the Presidente of the Republica. "He is to be eliminated. Tonight."

Albino glanced at his watch. "Does the Capitan realize it is four o'clock in the morning?"

"This morning then. I might add that orders for his elimination come directly from the Jefatura. The Senador was scheduled to die on Saturday in a very quiet way. That is to say, under the most natural of circumstances. However, new developments demand that he be dispatched immediately, under any circumstnaces." The Capitan turned and faced Albino. "You must not botch this job, Albino, and you must not get ghoulish. Shoot him or stab him but do not massacre his face. The Senador is highly esteemed by the people and will be given an elegant funeral. The body will lie in state in the capitol building. We assume many people will visit his bier, and we think they will like to look sadly upon his face. Therefore, do not disfigure it."

"The Senador is well protected. He has many bodyguards."

"Take a few men with you if you wish, but that does not mean to start a war in Marianao. Gain entrance into his house on any pretext, arrest the Senador and remove him to some secluded spot in the country and shoot him. You must try to make it appear that members of the July 26th movement are the assassins. Is that clear?"

"What about the others?"

"Shoot Lopez and the rest of the Senador's staff, including his confidential secretary."

"What about the Senador's wife and children?"

"They are vacationing in Miami. Any further questions?"

"No," Albino said. He pulled a thirty-two snub-nosed revolver from his pocket and examined it. Satisfied, he returned it to his shoulder holster. "I will expect my usual bonus when I return," he said, then he saluted the Capitan. "Well, I see you later."

The Capitan returned the salute. "Goodbye, Albino."

Osvaldo returned to the office as Albino went out the door. "What do you plan to do with Senor Castillo?" he asked the Capitan. "Are you really going to sign that complaint against him? I do not think that a wise move, mi Capitan."

"Tonight we will take him out into the country, shoot him, and bury his cadaver in the woods. As you say, he is too dangerous to keep alive."

"Shall I make out the reports?"

"Yes, but only make out the standard amount of copies. I will deliver one copy to the Presidente myself and give him a first hand account of everything that has happened. You better have Senor Castillo sign those statements, too. Then place them in our secret files. Later, when we hear from Albino, we will pay a visit to the former Senador's home and recover those venomous bottles."

"As you wish, mi Capitan."

"Oh, and another thing, Osvaldo: Do not mention a word of this incident to anyone. No sense in permitting those other slobs in the government taking credit for our nights work. Do you understand, Lieutenant?"

"Si, Senor." Suddenly Osvaldo did a double take. He blinked. "Lieutenant, mi Capitan?"

"Si, Osvaldo. As of now you are a Lieutenant."

"Oh, thank you, mi Capitan. Thank you," the clerk said happily.

"You know," the Capitan said reflectively. "I think the Presidente will be pleased to get his hands on those bottles. But I don't think it wise to ever attend any of his dinner functions on an empty stomach. Make a notation, Osvaldo. Remind me that I must henceforth never drink or eat anything in the Presidente's house."

"Of course, mi Capitan."

The Capitan leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over his belly. "This man Castillo, he is obviously demented." He pointed a finger at Osvaldo. "Ah, but he is shrewd, like a fox."

"Do you suspect this business of the poison to be a hoax?"

"Oh, no. The poison exists allright. Military intelligence has had a report in their files on this matter for quite some time, but they never could discover any leads that might devulge the serums point of entry, purpose, contact, and final destination. Think of it, Osvaldo, because of the jabbering tongue of a drunken seaman and the idle conversation of this man Castillo with a policia we have uncovered a plot of the greatest importance to the nation. Term it luck or fate or what have you and the fact remains that we have accomplished in one night with little effort at all what the most brilliant minds in the Policia Secreta and Military Intelligence have not been able to achieve. We are heroes, Osvaldo, whether we want to admit it or not."

"Indeed we are, mi Capitan."

"There is only one little detail that disturbs me at this point," the Capitan said reflectively. "The detail concerns this man Lopez. Do you not think it an odd coincidence that this man Lopez, the personal bodyguard of the Senador, is a

close relation of that man, that representante, killed by Senor Castillo?"

"An intriguing coincidence I'd say," the clerk said.

"Yes," the Capitan said, playing with his mustache and staring absently at the floor. "An extremely odd coincidence."

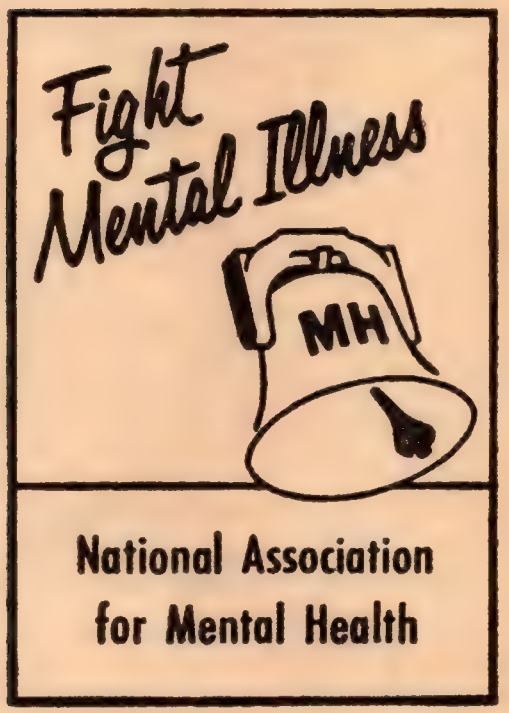
"Would you like me to order some coffee?" the clerk said.

"Please." The Capitan closed his eyes.

"Two spoons of sugar, of course."

"Yes."

Osvaldo left the office.



Lamster War

They fought for survival. Their ends were the same . . . their means were equally deadly.

BY DON LOWRY

I DON'T want to hear any more of that crap about cooperation between Uncle Sam's F.B.I. and the Mexican Federal Bureau of Investigation being responsible for tagging every American hood and heistman who lams down here. It's neither coincidence nor cooperation." Chico Winters pounded the Badillo bar top. "Some bastard is blowing the whistle on our boys before they have time to drink a Tequila Grenade at the Del Prado."

Chico Winters, a one-time Cosa Nostra torpedo, had become an unchallenged boss of U.S. lamsters who sought refuge in the Prince Montio slum area in the central section of Mexico City. Local precinct police were content to leave the five-block area along Basilo Badillo street unpoliced—as long as gringo expatriates paid their way and refrained from assorted habits of mayhem for which they had exiled themselves from U.S. cities.

Chico's unresponsive listeners were Jose Hernandez, a Badillo bartender, who had once progressed from the role of a migratory fruit picker to that of a North Clark Street beer slinger in Chicago, and Jim Deline, a fugitive from Detroit's holdup squad. Jose was responsible for the Prince Montios' popularity among American lamsters. He spoke and understood the gringo tongue; was well-acquainted with intricacies of local payoffs to federalistas; and had, through former acquaintances in the Chicago underworld, developed the Mexico city area around the Prince Montio, into a popular hangout for lamsters from the United States. Jim Deline's interest in the welfare of fellow fugitives was material—flush with loot from a Detroit payroll heist, he had been induced to buy a piece of the Badillo bar.

All was not well in the Mexican haven. Lamster after lamster had been knocked off by Mexican F.B.I. men, trained at the U.S. F.B.I. school to operate in an efficient manner respected by hoodlums who had fled its northern counterpart. Gimpy Davis, a Maryland counterfeiter, had been arrested on his first day in Mexico. Little Joe Zavata, a West Texas bandit, who was arrested for an Army payroll heist, barely had time to shack up with an Avenida Juarez senorita before federal police crashed into his room. Little Joe, who only aban-

doned his .38 when making love, was thrown into the police car the way he was captured—naked. Tony Andrea, a fugitive from New Orleans, was enjoying his first drink at the Badillo bar when he was scooped. The Prince Montio neighborhood was rapidly losing its popularity among lamster patrons.

"So what do we do?" Devine shrugged. "Declare war on the local law?" "We're not dealing with local law that we can buy off," Chico growled. "This Mexican F.B.I. outfit won't do business." "Maybe we should look for a pigeon," Jose suggested as he polished a glass. "You think someone's putting the finger on these boys? Let's find the finger man." "Where-in-the-hell do we look?" Chico asked. "The way the feds move in, their information could come from States or right from this bar."

"Maybe the federalistas have a plant around here, Senor Chico." "Plant, hell, Jose," Chico snarled back at the bartender. "They work with stool pigeons the same damn, sneaky way the F.B.I. does at home. We'd spot an agent in this neighborhood like a new whore at the bar. Some bastard who's a regular around here is playing canary."

While the three lamsters from American law enforcement agencies were tossing their problem back and forth over the Badillo bar, three other fugitives from a different part of the world were discussing the Chico-Jose-Jim Deline combination at a pension on Acapulco's Los Hornos beach.

"Those U.S. thugs must go. We've come too far and established too safe a haven to let those savages destroy it," a tall, white-haired, obviously military type, quietly pointed out to his two companions.

"Jawol, herr hauptsturmfuehrer," an equally aged but still militarily erect Nordic guest of the pension agreed, "but how to get them out of the old city region is the problem. Our safety and that of our friends depends completely upon anonymity. Let a clue of our whereabouts leak out and every security agency from Western Europe, not to mention Israel and the United States, will move in. We can get rid of the occasional individual by discreetly tipping off Mexico's Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional or the Mexican Federal Bureau of Investigation. That's not enough. These U.S. thugs are spreading in the district. They bring in women, bars, dives, drugs and all their vices. They're not satisfied to find a haven from those who would prosecute them. They want the debauchery and degeneracy that motivated their criminal lives before they fled here. The peons of the old city cater to them for their American dollars. What were once quiet, narrow streets around the Prince Montio are becoming bordello boulevards and rows of honky-tonk bars. What was once a safe haven for our wun-

derkind is becoming a notorious strip of vice. We cannot stand notoriety of any kind."

The third pension guest yawned as he adjusted the canvas top of his beach chair. "I recall our Fuehrer's blood purge of June 30, 1935. It was brilliant in its plan to cleanse the Third Reich of undesirable elements. Too bad we cannot launch an operation here with the same final effectiveness!"

"And it's a shame we cannot stroll along the *Potsdammerplatz* and view Berlin womanhood, Heinrich," Alfred interrupted the dreamer. "Let us keep this discussion practical."

Alfred Kretcji, Heinrich Kobler and Kurt Hein were three surviving members of an S.D. Special Service Squad of Himmler's black-uniformed S.S. in Nazis Germany. They were among those who had escaped Allied prosecution for war crimes. One by one these Nazis fugitives had made their way across border after border. A small group had finally established an ultra-secret, quasi-official headquarters in the same indifferent part of Mexico City deemed a haven by U.S. lamsters.

American fugitives, sampling wine, women and song in a relaxed environment after weeks or months of looking over their shoulders, failed to note the more alert international fugitives. Chico and his fellow lamsters were not even aware of the Nazis group in the neighborhood. The Nazis, however, noted even native newcomers with suspicion.

Chico Winters left a cab at the Continental's main entrance on the Avenida Reforma. He waited in the hotel's lobby for an hour before he saw a tall, dark-haired Mexican cross from the lounge door. They sat down together in a corner of the lobby.

"When I tell you to meet me at eight," Chico complained, "I don't mean eight-thirty. When I hire a mouthpiece, I'm his number one client. What held you up?"

"A number two client, Senor Winters. I regret I inconvenienced you. How can I be of assistance this time?"

"I've got a friend coming down on a T.C.A. flight from Toronto. I want him fixed up with Mexican citizenship papers, a Mexican marriage certificate, and all the I.D. a leading citizen of this gawdamn town would have. I want him wrapped so tight in official documents that he can walk away from the Mex F.B.I. or any other cop. How much and how soon can you deliver?"

"Five hundred, U.S., senor, and your papers will be ready tomorrow evening."

Chico handed over five crisp banknotes, a slip of paper and three photos of the expected Canadian fugitive. The paper showed the new lamster's age and physical description. When Jack Thomas arrived at

the Mexico City International Airport he would become Miguel Campanella . . . with papers to prove it.

Two days after the Canadian arrived in Mexico City, an inconspicuous news item noted the murder of Miguel Campanella in a room of the Prince Montio on Avenida Basilo Badillo. Cause of death was reported as strangulation . . . the weapon, a noose of steel piano-wire. Repercussions were greater at the Badillo bar and in a tenement four blocks away than at the local police precinct or the Canadian Consulate.

"Of no consequence," was the only comment made by the local police lieutenant. "He was a foreign *pistolero* . . . wanted by police in Canada, according to his fingerprints. His papers were forgeries."

"We're more concerned with how he entered this country than we are with how he came to die," was the observation of the Canadian consulate.

At the Badillo bar, Chico Winters ranted and raved. "Get that spic mouthpiece, Jimmy. He lives in the Juarez Apartments across from the Alameda park. Bring the bastard here. He was the only one who knew Thomas was in town."

"You fussy about the shape he'll be in when I bring him here?" Deline asked. "Jack was an old partner. He used to come across from Windsor and work with me in Detroit."

"Just so he can talk, Jimmy. But get him here . . . tonight."

In the shop of a piano-tuner on Avenida Basilo Badillo, a tall man used Mexican with a Prussian accent to berate a burly but cowering proprietor.

"I told you at Acapulco, Heinrich, there could be no purge here . . . not even a one-man purge. Why did you do what threatens the freedom of us all?"

"Here, Alfred, you are no longer a *hautsturmfuehrer,* and S.S. discipline no longer exists. I'll use my wire loop on every American who enters the district from now on . . . as swiftly and as deadly as I used it in the old S.S. commando raids. Don't tell me what to do, and don't try to pull a forgotten rank on me!"

Alfred Kretcji fired the Luger from under his trench coat and watched the surprised look on the face of his former *sturmfuehrer* freeze into death as he slid down behind the shop counter.

"I may no longer be *hauptsturmfuehrer,* Heinrich," he murmured dispassionately to the dead piano-tuner, "but S.S. discipline still exists. We are still at war."

There was no report of the piano-tuner's death in Mexico City papers. No body was found. The shop continued to operate . . . with a new but similar foreign proprietor.

Jim Deline pushed a bruised, battered, thoroughly frightened attorney through the back door of the Badillo bar and kicked him into

Jose's cubbyhole office. Chico Winters didn't rise from behind the desk. He spoke in almost a whisper.

"Only a sucker sells me out, Garcia. You haven't much longer to sing . . . but you'll sing to me before you stop forever. Who bought you?"

"I don't understand, Senor Winters. I . . ."

Chico's fist, adorned with heavy stone rings, shot across the desk top squarely into the attorney's mouth. Deline held the victim securely in his chair.

"That may hamper your talking, but it'll sure as hell help you to understand. Now sing, you bastard. Who did you tip off about Thomas?"

The Mexican's failure to meet Chico's demands for information was not deliberate. He wished dearly that he could satisfy this insane gringo and avoid the skull-crushing, rib-smashing beating Chico and Deline leisurely threw at him in the next hour. Jose looked into the office once through a sliding panel from behind the bar. He whispered, *"Madre . . . muerte!"* and closed the panel. Then he turned up the volume of the already blaring juke-box.

And it was *muerte* for the attorney. Finally his chin twisted crazily on his chest and his eyes rolled upward. Raw brandy from a bottle jammed brutally into his broken mouth failed to revive him.

"Now we'll never get the bastard to talk," Chico complained. "I told you to lay off his head, Jimmy."

"Well, he won't sing anymore either, Chico. To hell with him. How do we get him out of here?"

"We'll dump him across the city tonight. Clean out his pockets and leave him in a park. It'll look like a mugging . . . a real one."

The death of attorney Garcia was reported prominently in the papers. And, as Chico Winters had predicted, his death was attributed by the police to his efforts to resist an obvious robbery. The local Nazis colony didn't agree with the police interpretation. And Jose Hernandez wasn't convinced that Winters and Deline had slain the real finger-man. He had done business too often with the murdered attorney to believe he'd sell out any client flush with genuine American hundred-dollar banknotes.

"Maybe, Senor Chico, you and Jimmy should go to the funeral. Garcia had no clients other than ourselves in this region. If you see any mourners from around here, tail them. Then you may find your real canary."

"Bring Greta and meet me at Acapulco, on Los Hornos beach, across from the Roqueta Island lighthouse," Alfred Kretcji curtly ordered Kurt Hein when they met before the towering President Juarez monument in Alameda park.

"Why the beach? Why so far away?" Hein asked.

"I want only the sands and waves to overhear us. Be there at two tomorrow afternoon . . . and bring Greta."

"Jawol, herr hauptsturmfuehrer," Kurt Hein replied. He had not forgotten S.S. discipline.

Greta Hein was nineteen. She, with her family, had been on the run for as long as she could remember. Blonde, svelte, a Nordic beauty, she had been as a child thoroughly indoctrinated by her fanatic, stormtrooper father. She, like her parents, fervently believed that World War II continued as long as one Naxis breathed. She had as a teen-ager been an apt and dedicated student of every artifice known to the female security agent . . . from the seduction of unwary males to the fine points of murder.

Greta's more mundane schooling had included languages and stenography. When she had applied for the job of Attorney Garcia's secretary, the Mexico City lawyer had been delighted. Haughtily beautiful, cooly efficient, and with an excellent command of both Spanish and English, she was a rare find and an enormous asset to Attorney Garcia's practice. Her command of German and her Nazis loyalties couldn't have bothered Garcia less . . . even if he'd known of them.

"Did Garcia's law partners know of his American underworld clients, Greta?" Kretcji asked.

"No, only I knew of those clients."

"Is there, among the late attorney's papers, anything we should know of the Americans?"

"Nothing," she replied. "I've told you everything."

Alfred Kretcji looked out at waves breaking on the Los Hornos beach and up at the swank, cliff-top hotels. He sighed. "It seems we have lost our source of information."

"But Winters and Hernandez will still need an attorney." Greta explained. "They and Deline have a constant need for legal services. I know other legal secretaries. I may learn to whom they turn for counel."

"Yes," Kretcji answered. "You watch and listen while we wait and plan."

Greta Hein . . . and Chico Winters . . . were among the "mourners" at the funeral of Attorney Garcia. Greta recognized Winters and smiled demurely at him. Chico nodded. His mind and eyes hopping from one male face to another in the crowd . . . Chico failed to pursue his usual hobby of mentally undressing the chic female. He also failed to remember Greta as both Garcia's secretary and as a girl he had once seen hurrying along the Avenida Basilo Badillo.

"See anyone familiar at the funeral?" Jose asked when Winters returned to the Badillo bar.

"Not a damn one." Chico growled with disgust. "Gimme a Carta Blanca I'm thirsty."

A female voice from the barstool next to Chico's ordered a Pink Lady. Chico didn't bother to look. He sipped at his beer and idly watched Jose concoct the drink. Then it hit him. He murmured, "Pink Lady," and moved down the bar, motioning to Jose to follow.

"I've got it, Jose. And it's a dame."

"What's a dame? You mean that whore drinking Pink Ladies?"

"No. At the funeral. There was somebody from this part of town . . . a dame. She was Garcia's secretary. I've seen her in his office and I've seen her around here. And with the body she's got she don't belong on no steno's chair and she don't belong around here. I'm gonna' find out if she's our canary . . . and also how she performs where she really belongs . . . in bed."

"Maybe, Senor Chico, you shouldn't mix your love with your business."

"Do I tell you how to mix your drinks, Jose?"

"No senor," Hernandez grinned. "But I don't bring whores behind my bar. Have fun, senor."

"You may come in now, Mr. Winters." Greta Hein smiled.

"Thank you," he said. "Too bad about Garcia."

"Yes. We hope his murderer or murderers will be brought to justice."

Chico didn't pursue that subject. "I came over to pick up some papers Garcia had been working on for me, about some property down at Matilla. A beach cottage he picked up for me . . . beautiful spot a couple of hours drive south of Acapulco. Know about the papers?"

"I do, Mr. Winters. But they still require further work by an attorney. Will you be retaining one of Senor Garcia's law partners, or do you have another lawyer in mind?"

Chico didn't walk into Greta's trap. He smiled thoughtfully, "Not at the moment. I'll look around."

"We'll be happy to recommend one, Mr. Winters," Greta sparred.

It was a toss-up who led who on. The Nazis girl wanted to cultivate Winters, and the lamster torpedo wanted her . . . for two reasons. A date for cocktails came easily. Greta passed the word, and when the couple walked into the Del Prado bar they were well chaperoned by shadowers once deemed among the best in Europe . . . two former members of the S.S. Special Service Squad. Greta happily agreed to fly down to Matilla over the week-end to see Chico's beach cottage.

"Did you get any information from the American pig?" Alfred Kretcji asked Greta later that evening when she arrived at her father's Basilo Badillo flat. She had tried to lead Chico on a blind trail by having him drop her off at one of the new skyscraper apartment houses near *Avenida Reforma*. But Winters also had graduated from a

famed "school" of shadowers . . . the more practical and equally efficient school of the Cosa Nostra. He tailed her back to the Hein flat not far from Jose's Badillo bar. He noted the address and apartment number after hanging around long enough to trust the wily girl was not dropping another red herring on the trail.

"Find out who lives at that spot," he ordered Jose. "And get me a charter flight down to Matilla for tomorrow afternoon. I'll find out what that babe knows, and what she can deliver, in more ways than one."

"Find out why he buys a Matilla beach cottage," Alfred Kretcji ordered Greta. He and Kurt Hein had agreed that the trip to the tiny, isolated coastal village might prove fruitful. "I'll have Hans leave tonight for Acapulco. He can rent a car there and drive down to Matilla. If there is trouble, *fraulein,* Hans can make sure Winters receives rather than causes it. If you can learn who will handle the legal work for the Americans from now on, leave Winters at Matilla . . . for the sharks and crabs."

Hans, another second generation Nazis raised and trained in exile by his parents, took a commercial flight to Acapulco where he rented a car. When the chartered twin-engine Beechcraft rolled to a stop on Matilla's wide beach the next day, the burly junior Nazis *turista* moved unsuspected through the picturesque little village.

"There's the cottage, Greta." Winters pointed to an isolated, palm-thatched structure platformed on piling driven into beach-edge sand. He turned to the pilot. "I'll make my own arrangements for a return flight." He spoke into the cabin with his back to Greta Hein. His instructions were not heard by the girl, who shared with Chico Winters plans that only one of them would make the return journey to Mexico City.

"Ever drink *coco-loco*, honey?" Chico asked as he mixed rum and bitters and poured the mix through a hole punched into a green coconut. "Tastes like a soft drink," and, he continued to himself, has a belt like straight 100 proof alky.

Greta sucked daintily through a straw and smiled up at Chico. "It's delicious, dear." She made room for him on the couch and leaned back to stretch. Winters viewed her breasts pressed firmly against the silk of her dress and almost regretted there would be no bra to rip off. He slouched beside her and sighed. "This should be fun, baby. We can party, and tomorrow look over those papers. See if this shack is really the one I'm supposed to own. Like that?"

She moved into his arms and nuzzled his neck in a wordless reply. Chico momentarily forgot "business" and set his drink on an end table to sample what Greta had

to offer. Her kiss and the unparried acceptance of his exploring hands aroused Chico to bolder searching. Only when he began to move Greta to a prone position did she interrupt his lovemaking.

"Can I have another *coco-loco* first, honey?" she purred with pseudo-passion. "We have all night for love."

He grinned and groaned as he pushed himself up from her. "Name it, baby, and you can have it." He handed her his own untouched drink and rose to mix another.

Hans moved quietly through palms toward the beach cottage. He had seen where the couple walked from the plane. He waited. Then, leaving his shoes and socks in the palm grove, he crept toward the cottage in the gathering dusk. As the sun dropped into the ocean, he moved between its piling supports and listened.

"Why the cottage way down here, darling?"

Chico saw no reason to lay a story on his guest. She was not going to have the opportunity to use her information ever again.

"For friends arriving from up north, baby. Too many 'accidents' happening to them around the Prince Montio. Or haven't you noticed?" he asked with barely veiled sarcasm. He finished a *coco-loco* for himself and drew thirstily through the straw.

"Accidents, darling?"

"Arrests, my dear. And murder. You worked for Garcia. Didn't you share his knowledge of clients' affairs?"

"He handled your business himself, dear." Greta bantered. "He even did most of the typing concerning your legal affairs."

"And did he do all the filing?" Winters continued in what seemed to be playful repartee. He rose to mix more *coco-locos*, not bothering to maesure rum nor bitters. The bantering . . . and *coco-locos* . . . continued for an hour. The pitch of Chico's voice rose, and, as he drew deeper from the green nuts, beads of sweat appeared on his forehead. He would, he decided, find out her Mexico City contact and then make love, violently, without frustrating preliminaries. It wouldn't be rape. It would be murderous rape, he concluded.

Chico continued to question Greta Hein. As he was lighting a cigarette he knocked over one of her old drinks. It was untouched. His fury surged up in his already angry brain as he realized she had not been drinking.

"You smart bitch," he snarled at her. "You only think you're taking me. I'm taking you . . . and now!" Chico grabbed at her and, with one lunging rip, tore the flowered silk dress from her. He followed his lunge with a back-handed blow that slammed her back onto the couch. A clawing hand, leaving four ugly scratches on her stomach,

snatched into shreds what remained of her flimsy panties. He hurled himself on to what was apparently a frightened, defenseless, naked girl . . . and met sudden death in two violent forms. Greta Hein squirmed lithely. Instead of landing on a soft warm body, he impaled himself on a deftly opened switch-blade. His own weight buried the blade in his gut, and his own gasp covered the gentle sound of the silenced revolver in Hans' hand. The slug tore its way through the back of Winter's neck and erupted from his temple to spend itself in a cushion of the couch. Hans thoughtfully retrieved and pocketed the slug.

"Get dressed," was his only comment to Greta. He tossed her a light poplin raincoat he had worn. Far from shore, Hans and Greta dumped the body. As they drove north from Matilla they could see the reddened night sky from the blaze of the burning beach cottage in their rear view mirror. Neither spoke nor sighed. Their training left no room for emotional reaction.

"Who will take over as leader of the Americans now?" Alfred Kretcji asked, of no one in particular, when Hans and Greta returned from Matilla. No one spoke in the shuttered living room of Kurt Hein's flat, and the former S.S. leader answered his own question. "Probably Deline." Kretcji turned to a carbon copy of Hans. "You know him, Adolph. Follow him. Work with Hans and Kurt. Put him to bed and get him up until we learn all plans and movements of these swine." He turned to Greta. "Learn to whom they turn for legal advice. If we continue to snipe successfully we may force them to locate in another area or city . . . or even in another country. Then only will their threat to our own safe haven disappear."

"Where-in-hell is Chico?" Jim Deline asked when Winters failed to return on Monday afternoon. "Think he's shacked up with that dame he flew down to Matilla?"

"Maybe," Jose Hernandez shrugged. "And maybe not. You hear from the boys you sent over to case her apartment?"

"They'll check in tonight. Why don't you call that pilot and find out what gives at Matilla. Chico has too many dames on the string to spend more than a week-end on beach with one. And he had business here today. Something's wrong, Jose. Call the airport."

The Beechcraft pilot not only told Jose that Chico Winters had cancelled his return flight, but also told of another charter to Matilla on Sunday, during which he had noticed the fire-gutted beach cottage. Jose placed the phone back on its cradle and looked across the desk at Deline. "I think maybe your right, senor. Chico's cottage was destroyed in a fire over the week-end."

"Send somebody to that dame's apartment to see if she's in town." Deline growled.

"I can find that out from here." Hernandez dialed the former Garcia law office and asked for Greta Hein. When she answered, he asked in Spanish for "Senor Garcia." He made no comment when the secretary mentioned the manner in which the late attorney had left the firm.

"Senorita Hein is at her office, Jim. Maybe we should send one of the boys for her?"

"We'll get her tonight, Jose."

"What about Chico? What about the cottage at Matilla? I think Chico had plans for two new boys due in today at the Acapulco airport. I think they were to hole up at the cottage until things quiet down here in town. What about them?" Jose asked.

"You grab a plane to Acapulco, Jose. Bring those boys back. I want to find out what gives here . . . and I'll find out tonight. How many of our people are still around?"

"Maybe ten, maybe twenty. Some leave I think. I'll see you when I get back from Acapulco."

When Deline discovered from his stake-out that the tenement in which Greta lived was entirely occupied by Germans, he jumped to an accurate conclusion . . . that some or all of the tenants were themselves lamsters of a different breed. Mexico City's teeming millions was as good a cover for wanted Nazis krauts as for wanted U.S. hoods.

"Tail that dame when she leaves her office. Snatch her," he told two fellow lamsters, "and bring her here. Don't fall for her charms. She's no cherry to rough stuff. Slug her if you have to . . . but get her here alive."

Deline wasted no time with Greta. "Tie her in that goddam chair." He pointed to a straight-backed chair in front of Hernandez' desk. He began with a series of brutal cuffiings and back-hands across her face. Two diamond rings left bloody slashes in a once beautiful face. His violence was wordless. She neither screamed nor spoke, but tears mixed with the blood and ripped flesh. Deline walked to the wall and tore a mirror from its hanger. He held it up in front of Greta. "If you can see, bitch, get wise to what I'll do to the rest of you in a few flat minutes if you don't come up with answers I want. I haven't time for games." He emphasized his words with a straight-arm blow to the girls stomach. She vomited and stared glassy-eyed into Deline's eyes.

"Where did you leave Chico Winters?"

"I don't know any Chico Winters," she lied.

Deline ripped off the front of Greta's dress, slip and bra with a two-handed grab. He raked across

her breasts with a back-handed, ring-slashing tear. Greta screamed.

"The truth, you Nazis whore," Deline snarled. He swung again and landed a full, arm-length blow to Greta's throat. She sagged in the chair. The telephone rang. Deline turned to pick it up. "Get a crock of brandy from the bar and bring her to. I'm just getting warmed up." He spoke into the phone, "Hello."

"This is Jose. I have our friends, Jim. And I have some news of Chico."

"Where is he?"

"I think maybe he's at Matilla."

"Whaddaya mean, 'you think'. What-in-hell do you know?" Deline growled.

"Well, senor, the Acapulco paper says a body was washed up on the beach at Matilla. Its guts were open and it had a hole in its head. Like I said . . . I think maybe he's still at Matilla."

"Where're you now, Jose?"

"At the airport in Acapulco."

"Get back up here fast. And bring those boys. I'm going to clean house around this neighborhood."

Deline smashed the phone down and turned back to Greta who was gasping and sobbing convulsively from the brandy forced down her throat.

"You ready to talk, now, you Nazis bitch? You been feeding information to your Nazis pimps down the street? You been tipping off the Mex F.B.I. on us?" Deline added force to his questions with a vicious stomp of his heel on Greta's instep. "Talk or die!" he screamed at the girl.

"I'll die," she spat at him, "or live to see you die. And *Gott*, what a death it will be for you."

Greta died. Deline's reply was a karate blow to her neck. It snapped. "Get her out of here." he snarled at his green-faced henchmen. "Dump her in the door of that flat down the street. We'll see if those bastards can take a hint."

Jose Hernandez paled when he learned how Deline had squared Chico's murder. "I think maybe, senor, you raise some hell. Maybe we should close up for a while and take a little trip. The weather's nice at Tampico this time of year."

"Get smart, Jose. That's what these bastards want. They want us out. We stay. We've money invested here. We have connections. Good boys back in the States know what we have to offer them here. This is the best protection racket yet. And we have protection from the local law . . . all except the *federalistas*."

"Maybe, senor, you get too rough for Avenida Basilo Badillo cops. Maybe we lose what we have."

"When the going gets too rough for you, Jose, take off. I'm calling the shots now that Chico's gone . . . and I'm calling them my way."

"Si, senor." Jose grinned and turned to studiously polish a glass. He noticed that the bar was beginning to fill up. The time was

wrong for a rush of business . . . siesta time of a mid-week afternoon. The customers drifting in were not the usual dames, drifters and barflies. They were almost uniform in appearance . . . tall, well-built, almost military in their movements. "I think maybe I go to Tampico," he said to himself, as he moved toward the bar's rear exist.

He reached the rear door and passed through it. He didn't hear the thud of the blackjack as it slapped professionally a half-inch above and an inch behind his right ear.

"What the hell do you want?" Deline asked when Kurt Hein walked unannounced into the bar office.

"You!" was Hein's reply. He stepped aside, a Luger steady in his hand, as three younger men took over the role of hustling Deline out the Badillo bar's rear door and into the basement of the neighboring tenement. In the dim light of the basement room Deline saw Jose Hernandez bound to a supporting upright.

"Maybe, Senor Jim, we don't see Tampico," the Mexican grinned.

Deline was tied, like Jose, to another upright. Alfred Ketcji presided. Kurt Hein impassively goose-stepped to face Hernandez. Methodially he slipped a clip into the Luger, raised the weapon and emptied it into Jose's mouth.

Kurt Hein turned with an echoing click of his heels and stepped directly in front of Jim Deline. He released the spent clip and seated a fresh one. Only an animal-like growl came from Deline's throat as Hein raised the weapon.

The blazing Badillo bar lit Avenida Basilo Badillo like an enormous torch on a festival eve. Fire-fighting equipment, hampered by the narrow old-town streets, were unable to prevent the flames from spreading. The neighboring tenements added fuel to the inferno that turned into one of Mexico City's worst fires. Police and fire department investigators were puzzled. As one official observed, "Little use in spending time here . . . looks like a chemical plant went up in smoke. There isn't a shred of material I could identify under a microscope."

As a glass-bottom boat pulled out from Acapulco's Caleta Beach, two passengers whispered quietly as they stared down into the clear, peaceful water. "Where now, Alfred?" one asked.

"Our group must disband, Kurt. What we felt was safety in numbers proved dangerous in the end. We must go our separate ways, each to search for his own haven."

"It's a lonely way, *mein hauptsturmfuehrer*. We are not trained for this. We need each other. We must be led." There was a note of terror in Kurt Hein's voice. He watched a school of tiny fish ma-

neuver in the green sun-speckled water. "See even the fish are lost without their own."

"*Ja,* Kurt, but death is lonely too . . . and . . . who knows? As the fool Americans would say, 'Life on the lam is a lonely way.' But I see no alternative."

Convict?

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The stranger was young and tall, handsome and well-dressed. It was almost *love at first sight.*

travelin' man

BY ROD BRYANT

Opal Black was all woman at the age of sixteen, or at least she fancied herself so. Her father's tyrannical rule had not diminished her confidence in her ability. She often pictured herself in the role of Cleopatra, though in physical appearance she differed from that famous personage. Blonde and willowy, she had a fresh prettiness typical of a country girl. She resented her secluded environment. She had visions of city lights.

The day they buried her mother, she no longer had a thing binding her to the farm. She had stayed by her mother's side during a long illness, and her conscience was clear on that point. She and her mother had had one thing in common, and that was hate for Dawson Black. Only one thing could keep her here with Dawson now, and that was lack of traveling money. If anything was scarce in the Black household, it was money.

They came into the old farmhouse soaking wet and cold, for it had rained all during the funeral service. Because of the weather, the sermon at the graveside had been short. If anyone other than Opal had shed tears for her mother, it had not been noticeable because of rain-stained cheeks.

"Git a fire going." Dawson suddenly growled. "Git dinner on. Luke will be coming in soon."

"Yes, Pa." Her voice was light and melodious as she obeyed. She told herself she would not be bending to his will much longer. She was not sad because her mother was gone; Her long suffering ended. She found herself wishing it had been Dawson who had been committed to the ground that day. She called him father out loud, but to herself she called him by his first name, for he had never been a father to her. He was her stepfather, and she had often cursed the

day her mother married the neer-do-well.

Opal felt a burst of song buoying up from the depths of her, but did not allow it to pass her lips, out of deference to the memory of her mother. After she had a cheery blaze going in the ancient range, she slipped off to her shabby room to change into dry clothes. She stood naked before the mirror, and ran her hands over the wonderful contours of full-blooming young womanhood.

When she had dressed, her eye was drawn to the window by a fleeting glimpse of movement outside. She pressed close to the cracked glass and peered out. Luke Banner, the hired hand, had arrived in the barnyard with team and wagon. Her heart gave a little startled jump when she saw the other man on the seat beside the hulking Luke. That the stranger was young was apparent in the way he jumped lithely to help Luke with the unhitching. Then the yawning black cavern of the doorway swallowed both men and team.

Opal colored despite herself when she remembered the day Luke had caught her in the barn gathering eggs, and had talked suggestively. She had grabbed a bridle from the wall, and hit him across the face with it. Luke had had a hard time explaining away the bruises to Dawson, but she had kept still. Now the blood rushed to her face not from embarrassment, but because she had felt herself drawn to Luke Banner that day. She was awed and a little scared because of the way she had felt when his eyes had hotly devoured her. Mainly, she was pleased to know she was attractive to men.

Now, that damn Luke followed her around like a worshiping pup, grateful that she had not revealed his indiscretion to Dawson. He had made a fumbling attempt at apology, saying he had been out of his head, bewitched by her beauty. Plainly, Luke Banner was in love with her now

"Opal!" Dawson bellowed from the kitchen, harshly shattering her reverie. "Git that dinner started!"

Opal sighed, feeling pleasantly sorry for herself. If only I could have a store-bought dress, she thought. One of the latest fashion. She was embarrassed now, realizing that the stranger was likely to stay for dinner, and would see her in her feed-sack print and heavy stockings. Daringly, she left the stockings off.

Before she had the table set, Luke came banging in. The stranger followed, his manner apologetic. Luke stomped the mud from his boots, and shook the rain from his big hat.

"This' here is Max Blessing." Luke boomed. "His brand new car is stuck in that bad hole up the road a piece. He wants a pull with the team, but I told him I'd have to ask the boss."

"I'm sorry to impose on you like

this." The handsome stranger apologized. He might not have been handsome. Opal thought he was, and her admiration was not entirely lost on him. When their eyes met, and a kind of electricity seemed to pass between them, Opal felt a tingling excitement along her spine.

"It's no imposition." Dawson Black assumed a hearty manner reserved for potential customers. "Anyone in need is welcome to my table. After dinner, we'll see what can be done about your car."

Max Blessing was appreciative of Opal's good cooking. She almost felt sorry for him. She knew her Pa and Luke had destroyed the warning signs along the swampy stretch of road, and she had seen them deepening the bad hole with pick and shovel. Then they had plugged the sluice and flooded the hole with water. Max Blessing had not been the first unsuspecting motorist who had supposed the water to be shallow, and plunked in up to the axles. The fee for the use of the team in extricating the bogged down vehicles was not always the same. Judging by the expensive cut of this Max Blessing, the fee would be stiffer. He wore a tailored suit.

After dinner, Luke and Max set out with the team to pull the car out. It turned out that water had damaged the ignition, and it would not start, so Luke pulled it the half mile to the farm house, and left it in the yard. Max scratched his head and thought out loud that it most likely would not start until morning, when the ignition had had time to dry. Dawson obligingly offered the spare room for the night.

In his pocket, Max fingered the rotor he had slyly removed in order to insure the car's failure to start. When Dawson named twenty dollars for the towing and a room for the night, he almost balked. Then he took one more look at Opal, and forked over the exorbitant sum. He hoped he had not misinterpreted her frank gaze.

Max Blessing's outward appearance was deceptively mild and clean cut. He was in actuality a rogue, a man with few morals. He was a procurer for a white slave ring, and a peddlar of dope. He appraised Opal as a potential captive, and an easy conquest. He was quick to grasp the fact that Opal despised her existence here and could easily be persuaded to flee.

Max himself was fleeing now, before an ever increasing ring of law. He had taken to the back roads this morning in an effort to skirt road blocks. He had to go on the assumption that they had his description, and the license number of his car.

After supper, they went into the parlor. It was very cold, and the atmosphere was far from congenial. Dawson decided to build a fire in the fireplace, but the wood box was empty.

"Go chop some wood, daughter." Dawson growled.

Anger flooded up in Opal, a resentment greater than she had known before, partly because of the humiliation of being so woefully ordered about before company. At any rate, anger grew to fury, and sparked rebellion.

"Get your own wood!" she snapped.

The pure venom in her father's expression instantly replaced her anger with fear. She could have bitten off her tongue, but now there was no retracting the statement. Dawson Black did not understand that in anger and resentment people often uttered things they did not really mean. To him, things were either black or white. There was no intermediate.

To Dawson Black, actions spoke louder than words, so he began lashing Opal with his open hands. The girl's screams broke Max from his trance, and he rushed in and pushed the big man away from the girl. The two men stood and stared at each other, and the room had gone silent, except for an occasional shuddering sob from Opal.

"So you don't like my methods, city boy?" The way Dawson said city boy made Max's skin crawl. He decided the man must have some special grudge against city boys. At least, it looked like he was going to fight, the way he stepped back, then leaned forward on the balls of his feet, with his ham-like fists balled and ready.

"Leave him alone!" Opal cried. "The fear which sprung into her eyes now was not for herself." Let him be, Pa. I'll cut the wood."

She went docilely out, and Max turned a contemptuous back on Dawson and followed her. He came up behind her as she was tugging at the axe in the chopping block.

"He's a beast." Max muttered.

She smiled at him. The livid red welts were fading from her fair face, but ugly black bruises were beginning to show. The skin was broken on one cheekbone, and a trickle of blood was dark against the whiteness of her complexion.

"I'd let you be chivalrous and chop the wood for me," She laughed." But a city boy like you probably couldn't do it."

He was at once nettled, and yet desirous of proving himself worthy of her praise. He took the axe and labored mightily to chop all the wood. Later, he helped her carry it in. Dawson seemed to be amused by his struggles in behalf of the maiden fair. Luke Banner's brooding eye and sour manner bespoke his jealousy. At an early hour, Dawson relieved the tense situation by announcing that it was bedtime.

Later, he lay on his bed fully clothed and smoked, a thing Dawson had explicitly cautioned him not to do. He was thinking hard about Opal. At supper, when he had let drop his destination as a well known city, her face had lighted up, and that current of electricity seemed to pass between them again.

Big Luke Banner did not miss this little intimacy. He certainly would have liked to short-circuit that current. Max chuckled, and he decided to leave it strictly up to Opal. The next move was hers.

Around midnight, she gently tapped at his door. He let her in, and she sat down on the edge of the bed. Her manner was straight forward, and without pretense. Her round blue eyes sought and held his. Her desirable red lips parted slightly in a little smile.

"You're going to the city." She spoke quietly. "Will you take me with you? I've no money, but I'm willing to pay in other ways."

He reached down, and lifted her to her feet, and drew her against him: "Let's see just how willing to pay—"

Their lips met in a kiss of fire. His first kiss was savage, hungry, but his next was gentle, and in a flash, Max Blessing, Rogue and neer-do-well, was transformed. He realized that what he had suspected was true. He was in love with the girl.

"Yes, you're going with me." He said. "Now, tonight."

This new emotion which had taken a firm hold within him caused Max some concern. Always before he had evaded capture because of his policy of never becoming emotionally involved. A vague feeling of uneasiness rode him, but the warmth he felt for the girl went far to erase it.

Now he tried to convince himself that he was not really bad; That he had trafficked in evil only for the monetary gain. He was sure that, if she wished it, he could shuck his dangerous profession for some safer, if duller, occupation.

Together, the conspirators sneaked from the house. Lacking a suitcase, she had shoved what few clothes and belongings she had into a pillow case. He carefully replaced the missing part in the ignition, and grabbed her arm when she started to get in the car.

"We'll have to push the car until we're away from the house. They might hear it start."

It was hard work for a city boy and a slip of a girl, but there was a slight down grade, and they managed to push the car a couple of hundred yards before they gave out. He muttered a prayer, and engaged the starter. The engine caught with a spiteful roar, and Max was panic stricken, realizing the muffler had been torn off when the car dropped into the bog hole. He started to slam the car into gear for a fast take-off, when she suddenly reached across and shut off the ignition.

"Max." Her tone was urgent. "I've forgotten something. I've got to go back for it."

He started to protest, but suddenly her mouth was against his, and desire rushed through him. Then she broke away, reassured. She knew he would not panic now. He would wait.

"I'll be back in a jiffy." She said brightly, sliding out the door.

"What is it you've forgotten?" He asked. "I can buy you anything you need when we hit the city."

"You can't buy me this." She smiled again, a little fluttery smile, and she uttered an almost imperceptible chuckle, the quality of which caused an unexplainable chill to course Max's spine. "I've got to go back."

She moved away like a wraith, and the foggy darkness swallowed her swiftly moving figure. When she reached the house she was out of breath, and she paused for a moment in the yard. Then she drew off her scarf, and wrapped it carefully around the handle of the axe in the chopping block, the axe with which Max had split the wood for her. Max would have been more than ever concerned over the seeming change in her, if he could have seen her face at that moment. Stealthily, she entered the quiet old farmhouse. From the dark, cavernous interior came the steady, rasping breath of her tyrannical parent.

Max sat in the car and waited for what seemed an interminable time. He desperately craved a smoke, but was all out. When she had not returned immediately, he had thought of going without her. He knew, with a feeling of weakness, that he could not leave her to the mercy of her demented father. It was new to Max, this feeling of Love. Perhaps not love, he told himself, perhaps it is merely compassion. He had never experienced either before.

When the waiting grew unbearable, he slid out of the car, and started walking slowly back toward the farmhouse. Whatever her errand, she might have awakened Luke and her father, and it would be them instead of her who would be coming down the road.

Then he heard her rapid footsteps, and she materialized from the darkness. She grabbed his arm and hurried him back to the car.

"Quick!" She gasped. "Pa heard me and woke up. Him and Luke are coming with shotguns."

In the panic of departure, Max forgot to query her further about her reason for returning to the house. The car barked to life and fairly sprang down the road under his deft handling.

The Trooper's car was back in a side road, as they so often are, waiting for speeders. It had been a dull night, completely void of lawbreakers. When the sedan with no muffler went speeding by, the trooper was instantly alert. He tromped down on his accelerator, and the patrol car leaped ahead.

"I see headlights!" Opal squealed excitedly. "A car came out of that side road. I'll bet it's troopers!"

A nauseous sickness gripped Max Blessing, fugitive from the law. Fear laid a sudden hand on his heart, and his foot involuntarily slammed the gas against the floorboards.

Opal drew down into a huddle on the seat, scared, excited, but confident of the ultimate outcome of this chase.

The trooper eased off when he saw the car ahead start to draw away from him. It was no sweat. The fools never learned. He picked up his radio and called ahead to the dispatcher, who in turn relayed his message to other patrol cars.

Two miles further on, Max caught sight of a roadblock consisting of two Police cars parked nose to nose, diagonally of the pavement. He decided to give it up, and eased to a stop. He felt a kind of relief, and the tension went out of him. He wasn't scared even when four Troopers approached with drawn guns. It wasn't the first time he had been caught. Catching wasn't keeping. He was quite confident he would beat the rap.

But nothing had happened, even in Max's tumultuous and checkered life, to prepare him for what happened next. Opal threw open the door, screamed, and ran sobbing into the arms of the nearest Trooper.

"Oh, I'm so glad." She cried. "I'm so glad he's been stopped at last!"

"Easy, girl." The Trooper said roughly, but not unkindly. She had worked her way into a real hysteria. The other three Troopers had converged on Max, and hauled him from the car. He had his hands on the roof, and was being frisked.

"He killed my father, and the hired hand." Opal sobbed. "He killed them with an axe, and then he kidnapped me. He beat me. It was horrible."

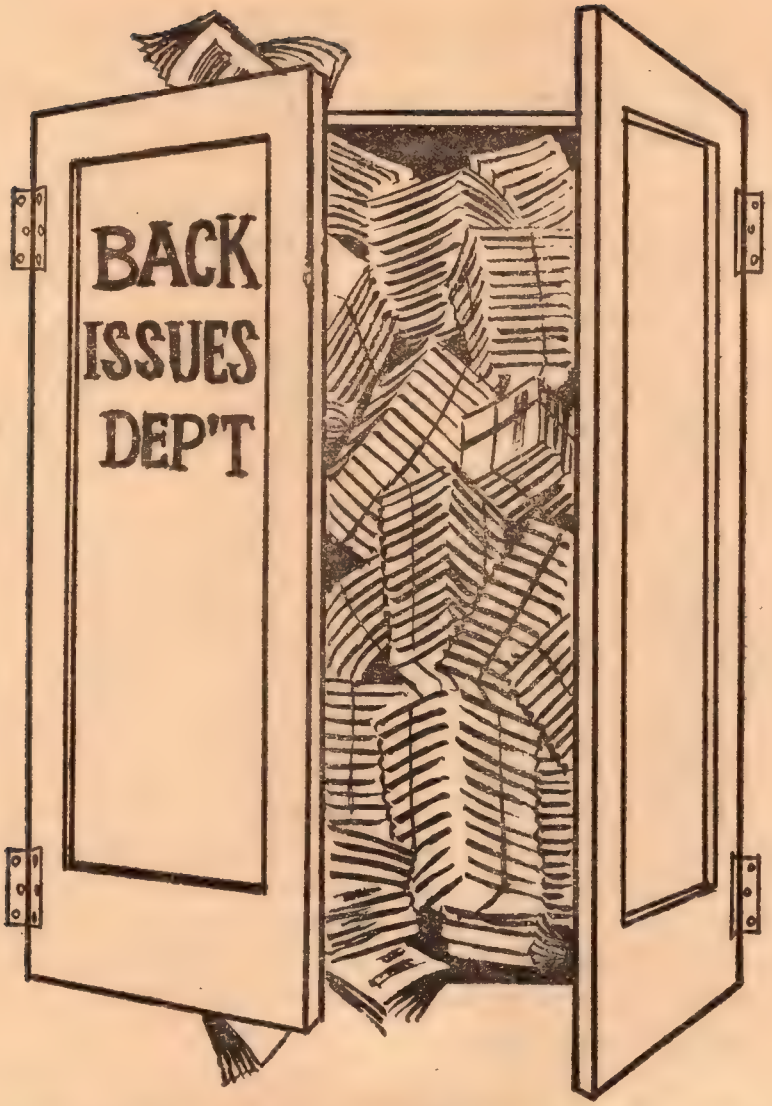
Max heard her. He felt all the spunk drain out of him. There was a knot in his stomach. Now he knew why she had returned to the house, and why, earlier, she had teased him into using the axe. She was not a spur-of-the-moment killer. She was a cold, diabolical schemer. Max shivered.

One of the Troopers was cocky, right on the ball. He had been checking the license number of Max's car, and now he strutted up and towered over Max. "Are you Max Blessing?" He snapped.

"Yes." Max didn't see much use in denying it. Opal made a mighty convincing picture, with her bruises and all. Juries, he thought dully, didn't have much pity on white slavers.

Max, he told himself, you're a little older, a hell of a lot wiser. But chances are you won't get much older, and you'll never have a chance to put that wisdom to good use.

Max smiled grimly. It was nothing unique, this being made a fool of by a beautiful body. It had happened throughout history. She met his gaze unflinchingly when he looked at her.



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AVER-SION

BY MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

Prescott had no stomach for violence . . . but in his chosen vocation, violence was requisite.

PRESCOTT recognized him the instant he came into the cantina. It was too late to slip away unseen. "Go!" he murmured to Concepcion. She shook her head stubbornly.

Horsch did a double take—genuine or faked.

"For the love of Mike!" he said. "So you didn't drown, after all?"

"As you see," Prescott grunted. He moved slightly, to shield the girl.

"Everybody thought you must have been swept out to sea with the others, though they never found any trace of you." The same old chatterer.

"And you?" Keep him talking. "Didn't they let you out a bit early?"

Horsch laughed.

"Don't you read the papers down here? I made it too, three months ago. They said nobody could, but this makes two of us, anyway. There were three others with me, but I was the only one got off the Island. I *told* you you could take me with you; I wasn't the punk kid you called me, who would louse everything up. Four years more of it, thanks to you"—Prescott looked up sharply, but Horsch's face was the same old amiable mask—"but here I am. Old copycat Horsch, as per usual."

"How did you know where to find me?"

"Oh, but I didn't!" Horsch's eyebrows went up in bland innocence. "Where else would I go—where

would any of us? Only place within possible reach where we're fairly safe, if we can get there. It never entered my head that I'd run across an old pal."

"So now what do you want?"

"Want? Why, nothing." Horsch looked hurt. "I'm not going to be a nuisance to you. If you don't want me around, O.K. This town's big enough for us to keep out of each other's way. Let me buy you a drink, for old time's sake, and I'll beat it."

Concepcion nudged him. She was right: better play it easy till he found out more. He shook himself, managed a smile.

"Nothing like that," he said. "It was just a shock—you know, I'm jittery all the time. Here, you're the newcomer; *you* have one on *me*. What'll it be?"

"No, no—this is mine. You order, though—my Spanish is pretty rough yet. And the senorita?"

Prescott's expression was impassive.

"Her? Don't even know her—just picked her up here. She doesn't understand English."

"Oh, I see." Horsch grinned. Conception got the hint. She turned away, spoke to the man on her other side. In a minute they sauntered away together to a table. When Prescott dared to look next, they had drifted out.

"How were things when you—left?" he asked. "Bad as ever?"

Horsch grimaced.

"Hell on wheels, as always." He gulped down his beer. "Look, Prescott," he said confidentially, "you were a hundred percent wrong about me. *I* wasn't the stoolie."

"Yeah?"

"No, I swear to God. It wasn't me got you those three weeks in the hole. If it was, would I have had the nerve right after that to ask to break out with you?"

"One thing I never said, Horsch, was that you hadn't plenty of nerve."

"Let's change the subject. What are your plans now?"

"Plans? I haven't any, yet. I just got here last week."

"You had help getting away, didn't you?"

"What else? Didn't you? But I couldn't get to my cache, if that's what you mean. I'm pretty broke. But I'll get by. I have enough to go on till I can get some more."

"Keep your nose clean, Horsch," Prescott said harshly. "This isn't any little banana republic; they've got smart cops here. If you get out of line and they pick you up, you might wish they did have an extradition treaty."

He had done what he could. "Be seeing you around. Thanks for the drink," he said, and marched out of the cantina.

Concepcion was waiting around the corner, as he had expected.

"Well? Did you get anything?" she asked. Despite Prescott's remark, she spoke English fluently.

"Not much. I tried to scare the dirty little rat but he didn't scare. I don't see anything to do but give the whole scheme up and get away from here to try it somewhere else. He'll turn me in the first chance he gets, if he can find a way to do it without getting himself caught too."

"I won't go," said Concepcion angrily, "And neither will Ramon. We've got a good thing going here, and nobody's going to beat us out of it."

"What did Ramon say?"

"He thinks like me. He says there is only one thing to do—kill the man, at once."

"No—no, not that. I couldn't—"

The woman's eyes spat fire.

"My brave man!" she jeered. "I know—you are a master robber, but you will not commit violence! See where that got you already in your life!

"Shall we wait then for him to report you, so that they send someone to take you again to prison? Or shall we wait for him to kill you first, for fear you do the same to him? That one, *he* would not hesitate to strike!

"Do not worry, querido—you will not have to kill the man yourself. Ramon will do it for us—he is not afraid of anyone or anything, my brother."

"Stop it, Concepcion. I'm not afraid. But I'm not a murderer, either—even of rats."

"We shall see. Come home now, quickly, before your colleague leaves the cantina and perhaps discovers us here. Let us talk to Ramon, and see what can be done."

So when Horsch, weaving slightly, turned the corner, it was empty.

Ramon was waiting when they got to the house. He needed no explanations.

"How will you have it?" he asked casually. "With the knife, or with my fingers?"

"Damn it, Ramon, I won't have him killed!" Prescott burst out furiously. "He's a dirty fink and I wish he'd drowned—but I can't just order a man murdered, like killing a chicken."

Concepcion hissed like an angry cat, but Ramon only lifted his eyebrows and went on honing his knife.

"You can't—it isn't decent—even a rat has a right—" Prescott sputtered. He gave up and strode out of the house, slamming the door behind him.

Of course Horsch would figure out some way to protect himself—And they'd worked so long on this job; it was so near— It would be pure self-defense.

But he just *couldn't* sanction violence; he never had in his life; it was the deepest thing in him, and he knew why.

He ended up by going back to the cantina and starting to get seriously drunk. Then suddenly it occurred to him that Ramon might act fast. He'd better stay sober till

he decided what he could do. What he ought to do.

There was no use saying another word to Ramon or Concepcion: that was out. And he needed them for the job. They couldn't pull it off without him, but he couldn't pull it off without them.

If Horsch had only drowned trying to escape, it would have been good riddance. But Horsch *was* alive and *was* here, and as long as he was around he represented a mortal threat. Just one word from him in the right ear, and Prescott would be on his way back behind bars.

So there was the problem, fair and square. Being himself, he could no more let Horsch be killed in cold blood than he could swim back to the United States. And if he just let things go, Ramon, with his lifelong knowledge of the town and his universal acquaintance in its underworld, would soon ferret Horsch out—and then no matter how the little fink squirmed and wriggled, he had as much chance as a fly under the swatter. If Prescott was to forestall a murder, he must anticipate Ramon without Ramon's facilities.

Finding Horsch oughtn't to be so hard, in a town of this size. The question was, what was he going to do when he found him?

He tried to remember, four years back, all he'd known about Horsch. Something might be useful.

Horsch wasn't a killer either, unless he could order a killing and stand well back where he'd never be connected with it. He was a stranger here, and had no money to hire a killer.

Prescott found him before the afternoon was over—in a joint down by the waterfront, a hangout for bums rather than for hoodlums. Horsch had had a lot more beers—he'd learned enough Spanish to say "cerveza"—but he wasn't drunk. Prescott nodded toward a table in the back of the place, and Horsch followed him.

"What do you want?" he whined. "I'm not bothering you, am I?"

Prescott caught his eye and held it.

"I came here," he said softly, "to save your life."

"Why?" Horsch asked bluntly. He didn't sound surprised. Prescott laughed.

"Not for your sake, that's sure. Just for my own, because I have a thing about killing—even killing you."

Horsch started a protest, but Prescott stopped him with a wave of his hand.

"Let's not go into that," he said. "I'm giving you a chance. There's a man I know here who doesn't like you. He has connections we haven't, either of us. When he finds you he's going to kill you. He just hasn't made up his mind yet whether to stab you or strangle you."

He had expected Horsch to panic, but cornered rats fight.

"So what?" he mumbled. "I'll see him first."

"Think so? You don't know him —I do."

"If he exists."

"He exists, all right."

"Why has he got it in for me? I don't even know him."

"Let's say he wants me to stay on here, alive and safe. And he thinks if you keep on living, you'll find a way to turn me in or get rid of me somehow. I'm valuable to him: you're not."

"Look, Prescott." Horsch's voice took on a pleading tone. "How *could* I turn you in, any more than you could me? Either way, they'd get us both. Say I even sent an anonymous letter, or made a phone call —and I can't write or speak Spanish—it'd be too risky. And the reason I know that is because you haven't done it already to me."

Prescott sighed.

"I'm not a double-crosser," he said. "You are."

"So you won't take warning? You won't protect yourself?"

"How could I?"

"You could leave this country, at once."

"I haven't the money. I told you I was broke till I can get hold of some through somebody back home I can trust. And what kind of fool are you, Prescott—according to you, if I went anywhere else, the first thing I'd do would be to get word in somehow about where you are.

"And then you couldn't bargain with me for a deal for yourself, for you wouldn't know where I was. Have you thought of that?

"I'd thought of that. I took the chance, rather than have your murder on my conscience. If you know what that word means."

"Of course," said Horsch slyly, "there's one way to keep us both in the clear."

"What?"

"Cut me in with you."

"Cut you in on what?"

"No—listen." Horsch's voice took on the persuasiveness that had been so engaging before everybody found out what he was really like. "You and this guy, whoever he is, have something on together, don't you? If you hadn't, why would he think it worth his while to knock me off just to save you? Well, count me in on it. Let's the three of us get together, whatever it is. That way, each of us has something on the rest. *Noboby can rat.*

"Come on, Prescott, have sense. It's the only way."

Prescott stood up to go. Horsch caught at his sleeve. Prescott shook him off and said abruptly: "Where can I find you tomorrow morning?" Horsch told him. Prescott left the cantina.

"You are crazy, compadre," Ramon said. "Bring that creature in with us, cut him in on the deal? He is to be got rid of, that one, not to make into a friend."

"I have no idea of making him into a friend. I told you before, I will not have him killed. The only other way is what he suggested. It is a good idea, even if he had it. We keep an eye on each other, him and me, and neither splits."

"And when it is over? When we have the money? Then what? Then he kills you or turns you in, if only to get your share."

"When it's over we go our separate ways. We won't stick around here any of us, for one minute. And then if he wants to inform on me—where am I? He will never know. It isn't likely we'll ever hit the same place at the same time again."

Ramon shrugged. "It's your party," he said. "I hope you won't be sorry."

Concepcion sulked, and slept in her own bed that night, but by morning she was over it. When Prescott decided the safest thing was to bring Horsch to the house till the appointed day, she made up a bed for him without protest.

They were waiting for Shrove Tuesday, and the Carnival, when no one would notice costumes and masks. By the new arrangement, Concepcion, as before, would engage the guard at the door, but now Horsch would back up Ramon. Prescott would collect the money. Only he could do that properly.

"Remember," he told them, "this is not a bank. If we hold up a bank, all we get is the money of this country. That is all right for you, Ramon, and for Concepcion, but I'm getting right out of here. As for you, Horsch—"

"*You* are getting right out?" Concepcion flared. "Am I not going with you, wherever it is?"

"Of course, of course," Prescott said placatingly. He had not the slightest intention of taking her with him, but that could be handled when the time came for it. "Horsch, you don't need to tell us your plans, but you'd better say if you want your share in local money or not."

"It'll do," Horsch grunted. "I'll be hanging around for a while."

Concepcion stared at him speculatively. For a moment Prescott felt uneasy, but he dismissed it.

"I've cased this place thoroughly. The tourists come in with their money—U.S., German, Iron Curtain countries, other South American countries, what have you—and it's changed for local currency. I've watched the system—changed a little of my own to see how they work it. Like I told you, they keep each kind in separate drawers behind the counter till it goes in the vault at night. Their own kind is in a drawer in front of each teller. So what I'll have to do is first clean up all the local stuff, then get hold of all they have for—for whatever place I decide to make for."

What place that was he knew very well, but that was his business.

"Yes," Ramon broke in irritably. "Very fine—we know all this already. Also that we pick the siesta hours, when they are least busy. I—and Horsch here, since you insist—" he bowed ironically to Horsch, who merely grinned—"we herd the tellers and any customers into the manager's office, in back. I cut the telephone wire and we tie them up and lock them in. Concepcion is keeping the guard busy, and she can create a diversion if anyone else tries to enter. You scoop up the money and put it in your sack. Then we scatter. We do not come back here, but we meet that night at the place you have chosen, to distribute the money. After that we separate at once, and each is on his own. Forgive me—my sister follows her heart.

"All very good. But what makes you think this can all be done if you do not allow us to protect ourselves? Are all these people going to permit themselves to be chased into the manager's just because we order it?"

"Of course not," said Prescott impatiently. "We've had all this out from the very beginning. You agreed to come in on that understanding.

"As I've told you twenty times over, we'll all of us, except Concepcion, have guns. You know that; they're packed with the other stuff right now. I had trouble enough getting them.

"But"—and his voice turned icy—"all those guns are unloaded and they're going to stay that way: not one bullet in the three of them. And before we start out I'm going to frisk you all and make sure. Those guns are for bluff. If you don't want to play it that way, then the whole deal's off.

"I mean it. I will not have violence—I hate it. I will not have anybody killed or hurt."

"Except us," Concepcion broke in. "It is suicide. You think perhaps nobody there has a gun or a knife? You think there is no alarm, so that before we can move the police will pour in? And *they* are armed. There are bullets in *their* guns. You think the manager will not reach into his desk and shoot as soon as he realizes what is happening?"

"We'll be the only ones there with guns out and aimed," Prescott said. "The surprise'll get them. Nobody's going to draw a weapon with a gun suddenly pointed at his middle. They'll do as they're told.

"As for getting away, don't forget that half the other people there, inside and out, will be in masquerade too. If we walk out quietly, without hurry, who will think it was the hold-up men who left just before the police arrived? For myself, I intend to stick around and join the crowd that will gather to watch. You may do as you like, as long as we don't speak to each other once we've left the place.

"And don't think, even if a teller is brave enough to push the alarm

button, that the cops will come as fast as all that. The streets will be thronged, even during siesta; they'll be full of marchers and strollers and dancers. The police will have a hard time getting through even on foot, let alone in a car."

"You weren't so squeamish, Prescott," said Horsch meanly, "when you and the rest broke out. Remember? Three screws were beaten up that time, and one of them died."

"I didn't touch any of them. And I dream about it yet. I can't help it—I've got a—what do they call it?—a complex about violence. That's why I'm a four time loser—because I'd rather let them take me than use it.

"Call me nuts if you want, or call me a coward, but that's the way I do things, and that's the way they're going to be on this job. What you do after it's over is your own affair. But just from the point of view of common sense, which is better—to be up for robbery or to be up for murder?"

Ramon scowled, but he had had this out with Prescott long ago. Prescott had to let him keep his knife, so he could cut the telephone wire: he had no intention of being taken without resistance. As for Concepcion, who knew what Concepcion thought under that veil of shiny black hair? It was Horsch who finally spoke up, and he changed the subject.

"What's the big idea of those crummy costumes?" he demanded. "I'll feel like a fool, going down the street dressed up like a chimney sweep."

"Will you feel like a fool when you use that coil of rope to tie that bunch together by their wrists in the manager's office? Just as Ramon needs the knife at his belt in his bandit's costume. Just as—"

"You think maybe he won't use that knife except to cut wire?"

"Ramon knows that if he goes against my orders I'll turn him in if it means being caught myself," Prescott rejoined calmly. "As I was saying, an old prospector from the mountains needs a big sack for his belongings. And the masks, of course, conceal us all. Even Concepcion will wear a mask, though her gypsy costume has no other importance and she leaves before the real fun begins."

Concepcion pirouetted, humming the "Habanera." Prescott smiled. Concepcion wasn't any too bright. It had never entered her empty little head that he meant to lose her as soon as possible after the loot had been distributed.

It all went like clockwork. It was a glorious early autumn day, in the Southern Hemisphere. The whole town seemed to be out on the streets in one grand burst of merriment before the restrictions of Lent, and most of them in masquerade. As Prescott had predicted, even the siesta hours, though they thinned the crowds, did not thin them very much.

When they entered the Money Exchange, one by one, as planned, there were only three customers at the counter—Nordamericanos, all of them, from the looks of them. Prescott was first, and he placed himself at the end of the line where all three of them were standing. The other teller gestured to him but he pretended not to notice and busied himself in fishing under his worn prospector's jacket, ostensibly for his money. The man in front of him in line bustled over to the empty window. The door of the manager's office was closed, as it usually was; probably the fat manager was sound asleep.

Horsch came next, and went to the center table to scribble on one of the paper pads there. In a minute Ramon arrived. Prescott glanced out of the door and saw Concepcion advancing slowly, twirling her castanets and essaying a dance step wherever she had room for it. The guard, a big stupid lunk, smiled at her, and she danced up to him and chucked him under the chin. He laughed and tried to grab her. She evaded him and then looked up into his face and said something provocative that made him laugh again. Ramon stood by the door, looking at them and smiling.

Concepcion reached up and pulled the guard's head down to whisper in his ear. It was the signal. At the same moment Ramon turned, pulled out the empty revolver, and said in a hoarse voice.

"This is a stick-up. Do as you are told, and you will not be hurt."

Prescott and Horsch had their guns out too. They stood at opposite ends of the counter. Everybody was covered.

"To the office!" Ramon commanded them.

Dazed, shocked, the two tellers and the three customers let themselves be herded under the guns into the manager's room. Ramon and Horsch followed them in and shut the door behind them. Prescott leapt the counter and began going from drawer to drawer, emptying the bills into his sack. The guard stood there staring, without even trying to unholster his own revolver. If he had, he would have discovered that Concepcion had got it first. Then, her part done, she had walked away, singing.

All this had taken less than three minutes.

And then suddenly the place erupted with police, in their fancy blue uniforms with gold braid and their silly embroidered caps. But they had their pistols out, and those pistols were loaded.

Prescott had laid his empty gun down on the counter as soon as Ramon and Horsch had pushed the last man inside the office. Two policemen pinned him against the wall; they reached barely to his shoulders, but they were wiry and tough. He did not move except to shake his head, as if to reassemble the thoughts in it.

The rest of the police rushed to the office door; it was locked, but they soon broke it open. Prescott stood listening. There were shouts and yells and then all at once two staccato shots.

They came pouring out again, like the Keystone Kops in an old Sennett comedy; but there was nothing funny about them or about the scene. Prescott watched while they dragged Horsch out. Horsch was clutching his thigh; blood was spouting in spurts from a severed artery. Inside, Prescott could just see Ramon lying on the floor, and the remaining policemen untying the rope from the frightened victims.

As they pulled Horsch past him, he gasped: "Damn you, Prescott! That damned girl—didn't you know she'd rat on us?" Then suddenly he turned ghastly white and collapsed limply in the arms of the men who held him.

As he waited in prison to be deported back to the United States, Prescott paced his cell hour after hour. Sometimes he thought of Concepcion, whom he had thought so stupid and who had been smart enough to realize he wasn't going to take her away with him. By this time he knew more or less what had happened.

As soon as they had separated to go to the Money Exchange, Concepcion had telephone police headquarters. Not only had she warned them of the impending holdup, she had given them Prescott's name and told them where and why he was wanted. Horsch she did not bother about; let him fend for himself. As for her brother, she had let him take his chances—she was angry with him too, sure he had known Prescott meant to abandon her and had kept it secret.

So here they were, thanks to a girl who had never been more than a convenience, and whom he had seriously underrated, as he did all women. He would never understand women—if he ever got a chance to see one at close quarters again.

He thought often and bitterly about Concepcion, but he thought more often and more bitterly about the two deaths—for Horsch had died the following day. Horsch he did not feel quite so guilty about; he had tried hard, every way he could, to save the little fink's life. This was almost the same as if Horsch had died in escaping from the Island.

But Ramon had been nearly a friend. And because of him Ramon was dead.

Yet he could not bring himself to regret those unloaded revolvers.

"No violence!" he kept muttering as he paced his cell. "I never want any violence. I won't have people hurt because of me!"

Then the thing he could never forget, and that he tried never to remember, got him by the throat.

The old man, the grim old man.

Himself, a helpless child, pummeling with his puny fists while his mother lay moaning on the floor. The old man dousing him with blood from the stuck and screaming pig, yelling at him, "This'll make a man of you, you yellow-bellied little coward!" The old man dashing the kittens' heads against the fence, kicking to death the little dog.

The day after his mother's funeral, when he was barely sixteen, he had run away with all the money in the tin box under his father's bed. He had never gone back. It was in his first jungle he had met Speedy, who taught him his trade. He broke with Speedy when the man blackjacked the grocer who had surprised them. Three times he had been caught because he wouldn't use violence to escape. The fourth sentence, he'd made the Island as an incorrigible recidivist. It was the only trade he knew.

The prison psychiatrist was going to have a fascinating time with Prescott.

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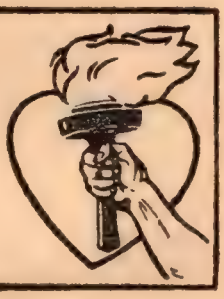

ALIAS: trouble

A MANHUNT CLASSIC

BY CRAIG RICE

"Don't speak bad of the dead, Malone," Joe the Angel said gravely.

At first the ugly little room was unfamiliar. Then, as his eyes slowly came into better focus, its details became almost painfully too familiar, too reminiscent of something he didn't want to remember just yet.

He lifted himself uncomfortably on one elbow and looked around. In the drab early morning light the cheap hotel room looked even more unappetizing than it had when he first entered it the night before. A brown painted metal bed, a brown wood dresser with a towel spread on its scarred top, two brown wood chairs with his coat and tie hanging over one of them, and a bedtable with a lamp whose scorched paper shade was a little askew. There was a wash basin in the corner, a frayed rug on the floor, and a lithograph of a glacier on the wall.

There was a woman on the rumpled bed. He had a vague idea who she was. She seemed to be sleeping, and he didn't want to disturb her. There were three unopened quarts

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of beer on the floor near the bed, and he didn't feel like disturbing them either.

He was lying in a cramped and uncomfortable position on the floor. Apparently he had been sleeping there, for some reason he couldn't remember. His arms and legs were stiff and sore, his head throbbed and his stomach was churning. He decided to stay right where he was for the present. Perhaps a cigarette would help, if he could find one. There were none in his pockets but he finally located a half-empty pack on the floor and a folder of matches near them and within his reach.

He tried to remember what had happened and found it an almost impossible task. The whole thing had started, really, in the dingy little bar on Clark Street, where someone had first called him "Turk." He closed his eyes and it felt as though the lids were scratching his eyeballs.

Something was very wrong, somewhere. His name was Charles Bekker, and he was from Hastings, Nebraska. But his new friends called him Turk Greene. Chicago was a strange city to him, strange and gloomy; he got lost every time he ventured from his little orbit of rooming house, restaurant and job. But the guys in the bar—and the girls—talked and acted as though he had been here all his life. "Hi, Turk, where you been the last few months?"

He knew where he'd been, but he hadn't been Turk Greene nor Charles Bekker either. He knew, but he wasn't going to tell anyone, ever. Maybe he would forget about it in time, but he wasn't sure. Even here in this strange hotel room he could feel the fear again. Sweat broke out cold on his body, the cigarette shook in his hands, and the room spun around him for a moment in which the churning in his stomach became a dull pain.

"Hi, Turk, where you been?" "Oh, just places." And there were never any questions, which was good. There was nothing he was going to tell them. Still, they seemed like nice guys. He didn't want to argue with them, so he just let them call him Turk. The girls too.

That reminded him, He opened his eyes, blinked once or twice, looked toward the dirt streaked window and tried to guess at the time. Probably very early, and already beginning to turn hot. He sat up, faint and dizzy. Must have passed out on the floor. First time he'd ever done that. He wondered if—he glanced toward the woman on the bed.

She was lying in what, from his angle of vision, looked to be a curious position, one arm and one leg hanging limply over the side. He caught hold of a chair and pulled himself to his feet, swaying a little, and looked. The woman on the bed was dead.

He remembered that she had

been a pretty woman. Girl, really. Her hair was a bright glossy blonde, he remembered admiring its sleekness. Now it was mussed and matted on the greyish pillow. Her dead face was blank, her reddened mouth was hanging loosely open. There was a bullet wound in her chest; her black rayon dress was smeared and streaked with blood.

The gun was on the floor. He wondered if he should pick it up. He kicked at it idly and then left it alone. He had never seen it before.

After he had stood looking at her for a long time, he realized that he had to do something. He had to get away. The police would come, and the police would know that he was not Turk Greene, nor Bob Smith, but that he was Charlie Bekker.

He gave a last look at the woman on the bed, picked up his coat and tie and threw them over his arm, and went slowly to the door, moving in a kind of half-consciousness. The door was locked.

The fear came back in a blinding, deafening, paralyzing rush. The door was locked. In a minute someone would come and look at him through a little window in it, someone with a horrible, mad, frightening face, would look for a long moment and then go away again. He tugged desperately at the knob.

Be calm, that was what he had to do. Somehow push away the fear long enough to act. He felt frantically through his pockets, his hands numb and trembling. He found the key at last in the side pocket of his coat. The worst of the fear left him then, he got the door open and ran down the shadowy hall, the door left half open, the key dangling from the lock.

There was no one in the tiny lobby except the dozing night clerk. He hurried out to the street and paused for a moment, trembling. His flight, he knew, had been not so much from the dead woman nor the police who would come sooner or later, but from the door.

An El train roared past overhead, momentarily deafening him. That explained something that had been bewildering him even in his half daze. There must have been the sound of a shot sometime during the night. But people had not come running. A passing El train would have hidden the sound.

He knew he hadn't killed her.

He started walking. Around the corner and half-way down the block was the *Friendly Tavern*. Closed, at this hour. He kept on walking in the general direction of his rooming house.

Several blocks later he paused in front of the smoke-stained brownstone and stared at its door. He was tired beyond feeling tired, his headache had become a sick pounding, he needed a drink and a bath, but he didn't want to go in. This was his home, his only home,

it was the address he gave. No, the address Will Jones gave. But it was strange to him. Charlie Bekker wasn't Turk Greene or Bob Smith or Will Jones right now, and everything was strange to him, and he didn't want to go into the dismal rooming house on Dearborn Street. He lit another cigarette and kept on walking.

He'd seen the girl once or twice in the *Friendly Tavern*. Her name was Susy. She called him Turk, and he'd bought drinks for her. He wasn't sure who had suggested buying three quarts of beer and taking them to the cheap hotel around the corner, but they'd gone. He remembered paying for the room, going into it and taking the beer bottles out of their brown paper sack, and that was everything.

2.

It was perhaps an hour later when he came to the park. The heat was becoming intense now that the sun was up, and there was a vista of trees and grass before him. But he turned and walked in the other direction, aimlessly, trying to find some feeling of familiarity in the strange city, some landmark, some combination of buildings and trees, something.

He walked for a while in the direction of the warehouse where he worked loading trucks, back past the rooming house, past the *Friendly Tavern* that still was closed, past the restaurant that had just opened. He went as far as the warehouse itself and then turned away. Will Jones worked there, but Charlie Bekker never had.

At last he came to the river and its bridges. Beyond it lay even stranger territory, away from the little orbit in which he, Will Jones and Turk Greene had moved. He stood watching the boats for a little while and then crossed over and walked a little way along the river, toward the lakefront.

In walking he had lost all sense of time, but, by the sun, the morning was half over, and the sidewalks steamed in the August heat. He took off his jacket and slung it over his arm, and loosened his tie.

The bars would be open now. He turned down the first street he came to. This, he knew, was the Loop. He had passed through it once or twice. Three or four blocks later he saw a sign: *Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar*. He went in, walked to the far end of the bar, and sat down. For a moment he buried his head in his hands, then tried to light a cigarette with hands that refused to hold still.

Joe the Angel looked at him, started to shake his head firmly, took another look and said to his other customer, "He's sick, Malone."

John J. Malone gave a brief glance and nodded. The little lawyer had troubles of his own.

Joe the Angel took the order,

filled it, and came back to Malone. "Lee Merchant's girl Lola, she's gonna come in here to see you. Your office, she don't like to go there."

"She thinks Maggie doesn't approve of her," Malone told him. She was right, he reflected, and Maggie had a good reason. The Lee Merchant case looked like another one of those that were going to end up making Malone a number of enemies and no money at all. He waited for her, brooding into his beer and paying no attention to the pale, unshaven stranger at the end of the bar.

It seemed like a long time before Lola Beck came in, sat down, ordered a beer and said, "This is a hell of a note, Malone." He looked at her admiringly. She was a big girl, tall for a taxi dancer, and voluptuously designed, with a mass of dark hair that hung down to her shoulders, and bright, full lips.

"It's all of that and more," Malone said morosely.

"I saw Lee yesterday. He's still inclined to go along with the boys. It's a lot of money, Malone, and if it's only a manslaughter rap—"

"He's still innocent," Malone said, signalling to Joe the Angel with his glass.

"But, Malone—" She unfolded the newspaper she had been carrying under her arm and unfolded it on the bar.

"I've seen it," Malone said, pushing it a few inches away. "I know what you're going to say. She was Judge Kramer's cute little this-and-that, the old rooster."

"Don't speak bad of the dead, Malone," Joe the Angel said gravely.

"Hells bells," Malone snapped, "there's nothing good to say about him. He *was* an old rooster, and he was so crooked that I heard at his funeral they had to screw him into the ground. And this little Susy cutie was at his apartment the night he was shot, and she hid in the can because she didn't have much on, and she saw who shot him and it wasn't Lee Merchant, and she was finally willing to come forward and talk because she's Lola's pal, and now somebody's shot her and I haven't any witness, and give me another beer." He didn't add that Lee Merchant was going to get a lavish piece of money if he agreed to a manslaughter charge and the promise of an early parole. After all, Joe the Angel didn't need to know everything that went on.

"What are you going to do, Malone?" the dark-haired girl demanded.

He sighed. "Go see Lee Merchant again and start once more from the beginning," the little lawyer told her. "Go away, Lola. I want to think."

For a while he sat gazing unhappily at the newspaper Lola had left behind. Susy Turner, unemployed model. Why was it always unemployed model or unemployed taxi

dancer? Why couldn't it just once be an unemployed taxidermist, or an unemployed baby sitter? He looked at her pictures, one a smiling full-face, the other a dark-clad body sprawled on a bed. Found shot to death in hotel room. Police seeking man who registered with her, name of J. Brown. While they should be looking for the man who shot Judge Kramer. Malone sighed again. Any way he looked at it, it seemed like a terribly unnecessary waste of blonde.

He realized that someone was looking over his shoulder, and turned to recognize the stranger from the other end of the bar. "Sit down," he said sociably, pushing the paper toward him. Joe the Angel poured him a second drink.

The stranger shook in what almost threatened to become a convulsive spasm, grasping the glass in both hands. It was considerably more, Malone realized, than a simple little hangover. "I'm John J. Malone," he introduced himself.

"Pleased to meet you," the stranger said. "But you won't be pleased to meet me." He began to laugh. "I'm J. Brown. I'm the man you think shot your only witness. But I didn't. And I'm not J. Brown, and I'm not Bob Smith and I'm not Will Jones." The laugh became horrible.

"And you're not Marilyn Monroe," the little lawyer said cheerfully. He gathered up the paper, took the stranger by his arm and steered him firmly into the back room where he shoved him into a booth. He was silent until several cups of generously laced coffee had brought a little color into the stranger's face. Then he said. "Now, what's this all about?"

"Forget it," the stranger said, gulping the last of his coffee. "I'd better be on my way."

"You'd better stay right here," Malone said, "if you've shot somebody, even if she was my witness. And more so, if you haven't shot somebody. I'm the best criminal lawyer in Chicago," he added modestly, "possibly the world."

The stranger looked at Malone, saw a friendly face, slightly mussed dark hair, a wrinkled shirt collar, a crooked tie, and a cigar. "All right. I picked up this girl in a bar. I'd seen her once or twice. We went to this crummy hotel and I registered at the desk as J. Brown and we went upstairs. That's about all I remember. I woke up this morning on the floor, feeling lousy, found her dead and the gun on the floor, and I beat it fast."

"Your gun?" Malone asked, "or hers?"

"Neither. That's all I know except that I didn't shoot her." He rubbed his forehead. "It seems like a bad dream."

"The kind of dream," Malone said still cheerfully, "that would send you screeching for the nearest psycho-analyst. That's the whole story?"

"That's all. Except the door. It was locked. I couldn't have locked it. I can't lock a door. Any door." He began to laugh again.

"Hold it," Malone said in a brisk voice. He paused. "I guess you'd better begin at wherever the beginning is."

"Trust Malone," Joe the Angel said, coming in with a tray. "He's a lawyer. He don't put people in the jail, he gets 'em out."

"It isn't a matter of jail. It's something else. Something worse."

"Malone, he's your friend," Joe the Angel said and went away.

"Now what's all this about doors?" Malone said, relighting his cigar.

"I'm afraid of them. Terribly afraid." Then suddenly the fear seemed to recede in the very telling of it. "I'll tell you about it. All about it. You can't tell anybody else because you're a lawyer and lawyers aren't allowed to. He drew a long breath.

"My name's Charlie Bekker, and I'm from Hastings, Nebraska. I got in a fight with my folks and ran away. I guess I was a sort of wild kid. I picked up a few jobs and hitchhiked around, and one time I was headed up through Illinois and I picked up a ride with some guys who were fixing to hold up a filling station, only I didn't know that. I rode along with them and they stopped and told me to get out and ask the filling station guy some road directions and I did, and then while he was busy with me they got out with the guns to hold him up, and something hit me on the head just about the time I heard a shot."

"Take it easy," Malone told him. He remembered the story vaguely from the newspapers. Two tough kids and a hitchhiker. The filling station attendant had been killed. The hold-up men had been caught and convicted. He'd never heard what had happened to the hitchhiker.

"I woke up in this place. I learned after a while where it was. I got hit with something and it knocked me out, and when the cops came they took me to jail, and I must've acted sort of crazy, because they took me to this hospital, and then I got to be all right again, and by that time they'd found out I didn't have anything to do with the hold-ups, and they let me go, and I hitchhiked to Chicago, and here I am."

Malone said, "But what does all this have to do with doors?"

"In this place. This crazy house. I was all by myself. Maybe because I was so sick in bed, maybe because they thought I killed the filling station guy. But this door—" It told with surprising ease, now. The heavy dark door that was always locked. The window in it that looked out at nothing save another door just like it. The hideous people who shuffled back and forth in the corridor. The faces that would

look in through the window, the terrible faces that would look and stare and go away again.

There was a little silence when he had finished. At last Malone said gently. "How old are you?"

"Going on twenty-one."

Malone frowned. "And your folks were never notified what had happened?"

"Nobody knew who I was. Nothing on me. I said my name was Bob Smith. Then after I got up here to Chicago, I told people my name was Will Jones."

"And then, J. Brown," Malone said, sighing. "Shocking lack of originality you amateurs show. Names like that are bound to attract attention. Now if you picked something like Roscoe McRolleroyster, nobody would even notice. But Smith, Jones, and Brown—"

The young man managed a faint smile. "And now, Greene. Everybody I know seems to think I'm somebody named Turk Greene. Maybe that's why I called myself Brown last night. But I'm not Turk Greene and I've never been in Chicago in my life."

He told the rest of it then, the strangeness, the curious predicament of being in what he knew was a new city to him, and of meeting people he had never seen before who assumed that he was a man named Turk Greene who had been in Chicago always.

"Turk Greene," Malone said thoughtfully, "is a rather small-time mobster. Always managed to keep out of trouble. Never been arrested. Older than you, but he looks younger than he is. There is a slight resemblance at that." He puffed at his cigar. "But not enough to make people who knew him think you were Turk Greene."

"But," the young man said unhappily, "why would they pretend they thought I was Turk Greene?"

"There," Malone said, "we are stuck." He crushed out the cigar. "And we are stuck at another point, chum. How in hell are we going to prove that you're not?"

"But I know I'm not."

The little lawyer reached for another cigar. "Lee Merchant knows he didn't kill Judge Kramer, too, but unless some miracle gets pulled out of a hat, he's going to be tried for it." He scowled and unwrapped the cigar with loving care. "Fingerprints. No. Unless you were printed as Charlie Bekker."

"I wasn't," Charlie said.

"I assumed not. I likewise assume that you were fingerprinted in your assumed personality of Bob Smith, or was it Will Jones?"

"It was Smith," Charlie said.

"All these damned names confuse me. Especially since you may be fingerprinted as J. Brown unless two miracles come out of the hat. Or maybe it will be the same one. Shut up, I'm thinking."

"I didn't say a word," Charlie said. There was a faint note of hope in his voice.

"Don't, then," Malone growled. He called to Joe the Angel for rye, tore a match from the folder and sat holding it in his fingers.

"That Malone, he thinks good," Joe the Angel said proudly, delivering the rye.

"Go away," Malone said dreamily. He finally lit the cigar and sat staring at the burned match. "It must have happened this way." Then he was silent again. "Joe!"

Joe the Angel came back, looked at the half-empty glass and said, "So soon?"

"Turk Greene," Malone said.

"A bum," Joe the Angel said briskly. "My second cousin Louie, he knows him. Another bum."

"I'm not interested in his personality," the little lawyer said in a severe tone, "I want to know where he is and where he's been for the past few months."

"I fix," Joe and Angel said, and went away.

"There's a man named Hank Toffa," Malone said in the same dreamy voice he had used before. "Not the right sort of person for you to know, Charlie. He's made a lot of money, and it's none of your business how he did it. And it's none of your business how he uses some of it, either, except that Judge Kramer was holding him up, and somebody shot Judge Kramer, and that must have cost somebody else money. And there was a lot of stink about Judge Kramer's murder, a lot more than anybody expected, and a gross or so of large-scale crime investigations started immediately, and there had to be somebody who shot Judge Kramer."

He paused to finish his drink, relight his cigar and draw a long breath. "And now a man named Lee Merchant is in jail charged with his murder, and he's been promised a right smart sum of money if he'll keep his mouth shut, accept a manslaughter rap and the promise of an early parole."

He paused again, this time to think. There was always this possibility, if he advised Lee Merchant to take the offer it would save a lot of time and trouble, and there was the chance that Lee Merchant would pay him a pleasantly fat fee out of the right smart sum of money. He'd argued this out with himself before and again he decided sternly that it wouldn't be ethical. Besides, he'd promised Lola.

"But Susy knew who did shoot the late Judge Kramer, and I was counting on her, and now she's dead."

"But what does all this have to do with me?" Charlie Bekker said anxiously.

"You have a superficial resemblance to Turk Greene," Malone told him. "So do a lot of people. Medium height, stocky build, brown hair, grey eyes. Same general type face. Yours is even more than a superficial resemblance. You walked into a saloon and somebody who maybe didn't know Turk

Greene very well thought he recognized you. Maybe these characters do think you're Turk Greene. But far more likely, after that first chance greeting, they had a good reason for continuing to keep up the Turk Greene routine."

"But why, Malone?"

"Susy," Malone said. "Somebody had to be framed for Susy's murder. And you can't prove you aren't Turk Greene without either getting your family in Hastings, Nebraska into the act, or producing Turk Greene. You can prove that you were Bob Smith involved in the filling station holdup, you can prove that you were Will Jones, with a job loading trucks, and the police can prove that you were J. Brown. And you can prove that you are Charlie Bekker and have been all the time, but from what I sense about your family, you don't want to do that unless it's a question of a murder conviction."

Joe the Angel came back. "Turk Greene, he's been away for three-four months. Somebody was saying he's back in town, but my second cousin Louie, he says maybe yes, maybe no. He hasn't seen him himself. Maybe in jail somewhere else."

"You see?" Malone said. "Bob Smith and Turk Greene could have been one and the same. Turk apparently an innocent victim of circumstances in the holdup and calling himself Bob Smith afterward, and his pals not giving him away, and then being released and coming back to his old haunts."

The young man flushed. "Malone. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes, dammit," the lawyer said. "My life would be easier if I didn't."

Joe the Angel said, "Me, I wonder where Turk Greene is now."

It was a good thirty seconds before Malone spoke. "Me," he said, "I just wonder where his body is."

He let it go at that.

3.

"Malone—" Charlie Bekker began. But the little lawyer was musing again. Joe the Angel brought two more drinks without being spoken to, and then went quietly back to his post behind the bar.

"The door was locked," Malone said at last. He seemed to be talking to himself. "The murderer, the man who left the gun behind, was the one who locked it, from the outside, going away. I imagine in that hotel the door would have the kind of lock that can be opened or locked from either side. Why would he lock you in with the corpse? Was it somebody who knew of your fear of locked doors?"

"But I haven't told anybody else," Charlie Bekker said. He added, "I don't think I told anybody else. I don't know—"

"For the love of Heaven, *try* to know," Malone said.

"In the washroom at the bar. A few nights ago. One of the guys there. The door jammed. I thought it was locked. I got panicky. The other guy got it open. I guess I told him I had a kind of phobia." He paused and then said brightly, "But I didn't tell him why I had it."

"Very wise of you," Malone said, nodding his head gravely. "Very wise. And now forget about it and don't tell anybody else. Ever." He scowled at his cigar.

"But what am I going to do?" the young man asked miserably.

"Hide," Malone said, He thought hard for a minute. "Can you drive a truck, or just load one?"

"Either," Charlie Bekker said. "Both."

"A friend of mine will give you a job," Malone said. He found a scrap of paper in his pocket and scribbled on it furiously. "There's his address and give this to him. Tell him you're Charlie Bekker and you're from Hastings, Nebraska."

"But—" Charlie Bekker said.

"Shut up," Malone said amiably. "Find a room in the neighborhood and tell your landlady that you're Charlie Bekker, of Hastings, Nebraska." He found another scrap of paper and went on scribbling.

"But, Malone—" Charlie Bekker said.

"Shut *up*," Malone said, even more amiably. "You can find a nice room here. Tell Mrs. Blodgett you're a friend of mine. Then," he went on hastily before Charlie Bekker could open his mouth again, "when you get settled, right away, write a nice letter to your folks back in Hastings and tell them that you've got a good job and have had it several months, that you've been living happily at Mrs. Blodgett's all that time, and that you haven't written before because you wanted to make sure you'd make good, but that now you've had a promotion and a raise in pay, and you want to let them know you're not such a wild kid after all." He relit his cigar. "I'm going on the theory that you were going to write."

"Yes," Charlie Bekker said, still miserably. "Of course. But I wanted to wait until I'd a good job and—"

"According to Jake Huffman, of the No-Litter Waste Disposal Service, and Ma Blodgett, you will have had one for some time, if the question is raised." He made a mental note to phone both parties. "You see, you've got to hide and to change your identity. And what could be a better place to hide than a waste paper truck, under what is, after all, your own name. Bob Smith and Will Jones have vanished, so has J. Brown and, as far as you're concerned, Turk Greene."

"You said—his body—?" Charlie Bekker said.

"I'm guessing," Malone told him.

"And all the rest of it—about what happened?"

"I was making it all up," Malone said happily, chewing on his cigar. He knocked off an inch of ash, most of which landed on his shirt front. "But it has to be that way," he ended, brushing ineffectually at the ashes and only making matters worse. "And don't *you* worry. I'll know where to reach you if I need you for anything."

The young man recognized dismissal. "You're a lawyer, and you get paid for things like this. How can I—"

"You can buy the drinks," Malone said, making a genial gesture, "if you have any money, that is."

The little lawyer sat for a while, finishing his cigar. He wanted someone to talk to, someone feminine. He could go back to the office and talk to Maggie. But Maggie was in her regular first-of-the-month state of mind about bills, and she would be in no mood to listen to a monologue about the late Judge Kramer, Lee Merchant, and a murdered blonde. After a little reflection he decided to settle for Lee Merchant's girl, Lola. She might not have any helpful ideas or information on the subject, but at least she would be a restful audience.

Also she wouldn't ask him about his losses at last night's poker game, and Maggie would.

He paused at the telephone booth on his way out, dialled police headquarters, and asked for Inspector von Flanagan of Homicide. He waited for the familiar growl to come over the wire and said, "About this blonde shot in the hotel room—"

"I hope you keep out of it," von Flanagan snapped. "I have enough trouble." He went on more mildly, "It's a nice simple little murder with no fancy nonsense about it and all we've got to do is pick up the guy, so don't you try to make something else out of it."

"Thanks for the advice," Malone said. "But do a couple of things for me while you're at it."

"What?" von Flanagan demanded suspiciously.

"Find out if the blonde had been slipped a mickey before she was shot," Malone said.

"Malone, you—"

"And more important," the lawyer went on quickly, "find out if the gun that killed her also killed Judge Kramer and trace its ownership. I'll check with you later." He hung up fast before von Flanagan could more than start an indignant roar.

4.

Up in Lola Beck's apartment on North Wabash he relaxed in a comfortable chair and loosened his tie. The steaming heat of the day was left outside; traffic noises didn't reach twelve stories above the street. Malone looked around the little apartment approvingly as he sipped the long cold drink Lola had made

for him. Cool, pale-green walls, exotic printed draperies, comfortable plump chairs, conveniently planted little tables that just missed being modernistic, and on one wall a bright print that just missed being an abstraction. Stacks of neatly arranged movie magazines and all of the morning newspapers. Altogether, very nice going for an unemployed taxi-dancer.

He finished his drink, yawned, stretched, and leaned back. Not only had it been a thoroughly unsatisfactory poker game, but it had been a very late night out last night.

In less than sixty seconds the little lawyer was sound asleep.

5.

It was dusk when he woke, a dreamy, shadowy, purplish dusk. He woke thinking of Charlie Bekker. He blinked a few times, yawned, stretched, sat up straight and stared at Lola. She was sitting in a corner, reading a magazine under the warm light of a rose-shaded bright lamp.

"It wasn't the man in the washroom," Malone said suddenly. "And the door was locked not so he wouldn't run away, but so no one would come in before he came to."

Lola looked up and said severely, "Malone, you're drunk."

"Not yet," the little lawyer said cheerfully, "but you've planted the germ of an idea, and thank you." He looked up Ma Blodgett in his address book and reached for the phone. After a minute of idle conversation he asked for Charlie Bekker and waited.

Everybody had been wonderful to him, Charlie Bekker reported. The job was fine, Mrs. Blodgett was fine, his room was fine, and he felt fine.

"That's fine," Malone broke in at last. "Now there's just a few things I need to know. About the guys you met in the *Friendly Tavern*. Yes, yes, I know damn well you're not planning to go back there, I just want their names, if you know them, and what they look like, if you remember, and who is the one you talked with in the washroom who knows about your allergy to locked doors."

Well, the man in the washroom was sort of a big slob with bushy hair. Charlie had only noticed him there that one time, never did hear his name. There were just three guys that seemed to be regulars, besides the bartender, of course. One called Jack, he was a tall, skinny guy with sort of reddish hair and a big nose, and he wore glasses. Then there was a real dark-haired guy, maybe Italian, not too big, not little either, just sort of medium, and real stocky, husky looking. Charlie thought he was called Jerry. And another sort of medium-sized guy with brown hair and a big mouth, sort of twisty-shaped, called Art, he was real husky-looking too. That was

about all except the bartender had a limp. Did that help?

Malone said, "It does indeed. You've got a good eye for details."

"And, Malone, everything has worked out fine. I'm writing my old man tonight and telling him all about it, and telling him that everything is just fine."

"That's *good*," Malone said. "So keep well, work hard, save your money, avoid bad companions, and don't ever play cards with strangers." He hung up.

"Malone," Lola said, "you *are* drunk." She moved toward the kitchenette.

Malone thought the whole thing over while he nursed the new drink she brought him. It was suddenly becoming very simple. Or at least, not quite as damned complicated. He lit a fresh cigar and looked appreciatively at Lola.

"A frame-up within a frame-up," he said meditatively. "Maybe a fall guy for a fall guy."

She looked at him suspiciously. "I wish I knew what you were talking about."

He ignored her. "Someone planned to lock Charlie in that hotel room with the body and the gun. Not so he'd stay there. Because this somebody used another key, and left Charlie's key in his own pocket. But so no one else would wander in, discover the murder and ring out the welkin."

"You mean welcome."

"I said welkin, and I know what I mean," Malone said. "Sound the alarm. Call the cops. This somebody didn't want that to happen until Charlie came to of his own accord, which he ultimately would, and did. Somebody counted on Charlie's doing exactly what any normal man would do under the circumstances, which was to get the flaming hell out of there."

"Malone, what does all this have to do with Lee, and do you want another drink?"

"Maybe I can tell you in a minute," the little lawyer said crossly, "And maybe I can't. And I do."

While she went to get it, he called von Flanagan. "About that gun—" he began.

The police officer's voice came roaring over the wires, and Malone held the receiver a good six inches from his head. "It belonged to Turk Greene," He said angrily, "and there's no fingerprints. It's the same gun that killed Judge Kramer. The blonde babe had been slipped a good swig of chloral hydrate a while before she was shot. That's all. Damn you, Malone, why did you have to get mixed up in this? It was a nice simple little shooting, and then—"

"It's for your own good," Malone said smugly, "and you'll hear from me later tonight."

Malone hung up, accepted the glass Lola handed him and said, "I knew it would be that simple."

"But who killed Judge Kramer?" she demanded.

"Probably, a man named Turk Green," Malone told her. He closed his eyes for a moment. "There was a bigger stink about it than anyone expected. Chances are, Turk got nervous and would have talked when he was picked up for questioning, and so Turk up and disappeared. Turk wouldn't have stayed away from his old haunts this long, Lola. I'm guessing at most of this, but in time it'll turn out that it happened that way. Of course, somebody might have shot up Turk in a moment of casual playfulness, but I doubt it. Because Judge Kramer was shot with Turk's gun."

He put down his glass and stared at it. "But the big stink went on, and at that time nobody knew what gun had shot Judge Kramer. Nobody had the sense to plant Turk's gun so the cops would get it, find out it had been used on the late judge, and belonged to Turk. Shocking lack of practical judgment there. No initiative." He sighed and picked up the glass again. "There was too much stink. A missing Turk Greene was not enough perfume. So Lee Merchant was framed and arrested, and offered money and the promise of a quick parole if he kept quiet."

He sighed again and shook his head sadly. "And no one will bother, probably, to collect the reward offered by the Citizen's Committee for the Decrease of Crime if Lee Merchant is convicted."

"*Malone*!"

"Stop interrupting me. Anyway, you came along and wanted Lee Merchant acquitted, money or no money, and you presented me with an eyewitness who didn't know enough to keep her mouth shut in low-down dives."

"The *Friendly Tavern* is not a low-down dive," Lola said indignantly. "I go there myself sometimes."

Malone opened his mouth to speak, looked at her, and decided to shut it again. "So Susy was murdered, and the guy who registered with her at the hotel as J. Brown was called Turk Greene by guys who knew him, and he's disappeared again. Only this time, Turk Greene's gun was left behind."

He scowled. "It was all rather inadequately and inartistically planned. Susy and the man they called Turk Greene were thrown together in the *Friendly Tavern* and mixed well with liquids, and nature was allowed to take its course. Then the last drink was lavishly spiked with knock-out drops so that both of them went out like a pair of Model T headlights about the time they landed in the room. Our somebody came along later and waited for a conveniently passing El train to cover the shot."

"But *who*, Malone?"

He yawned. "Jack, Jerry or Art. Take your pick. The point is not who fired the shot, but who hired the shot."

"Hank Toffa," Lola said

promptly.

"That's been common gossip since the late Judge Kramer went to his reward or to his just deserts, depending on how you look at it. The other point is to prove it."

He finished his drink, stretched and yawned again, and rose to his feet. "Which is what I would like to do. Stay here, sweets. Somebody may want to do a little target practice, and I'd like to use you as the target. Do you think on request, you could go to the *Friendly Tavern* and pretend to be damned drunk, and damned mad?"

"Hell," Lola said explosively, "I'll get drunk, and I'm mad already. At Lee Merchant, the big clunk."

Malone grinned at her. "Maybe there's a way to fix it so he'll be back in your loving arms, and still have dough."

6.

He was thinking of Lee Merchant as he walked out into the hot, oppressive night air and looked hopefully for a taxi. A likeable guy. Tall, slender, with very light yellow hair, and a deceptive look of fragility about him. Destined for failure in the various illegal lines of occupation he'd turned to after having already failed as a third-rate dance band musician. No wonder Lola wanted to mother him. Well, maybe money would do it. A nice little legitimate business somewhere. And he'd be stuck for the price of a wedding present for Lee and Lola. If his hunch was right, and everything worked out according to plan, there would be money.

But not for himself, he reflected bitterly. Sometime he was going to have that vacation in Bermuda, but not this year.

He finally hailed a passing taxi and gave the address of the *Friendly Tavern*. The driver looked at him, opened his mouth to speak, then looked again, this time at the little lawyer's limply wrinkled shirt and slightly crooked tie, and decided that he knew what he was doing.

The *Friendly Tavern* was a small, dreary and dimly lighted bar on a small, dreary street west of Clark, stuck in between a delicatessen, now closed, and a candy and stationery store, also closed. Except for the bartender it was deserted when Malone went in, sat down on the nearest stool and order gin with a beer chaser.

The bartender shoved it on the bar in silence, scooped up the change Malone had laid down, and paid no further attention to his customer.

After a long time Malone said, "Quiet tonight, isn't it."

The bartender said "Yup," and went on cleaning his nails with the corner of a match folder.

After another long time, and after serving another drink, the bartender said, "You're Malone, aren't you?" He didn't say it as if he cared much one way or the other.

This time Malone said, "Yup," and waited.

Usually that was the signal for a bartender to become suddenly affable, sometimes ask for free legal advice, and occasionally mutter something about one on the house. This bartender said nothing, his face still expressionless. He started work cleaning up the nails on the other hand.

A man in a green short-sleeved sportshirt came in, drank a beer, and went away. A taxi driver dashed in for a quick one and dashed right out again. Eventually two men came in, one red-haired and tall, the other black-haired and husky, and sat together at the far end of the bar. That would be Jack and Jerry, Malone reflected. They paid no attention to him and he concentrated on his gin.

Charlie Bekker's description had been adequate, Malone thought. The one he recognized as Jerry was vaguely familiar from some unimportant affair long since over with. He wondered if Art would be along soon.

Two gin and beers later there was no sign of Art, nor of the bushy-haired stranger who knew Charlie Bekker lived in mortal fear of a locked door. Malone was getting bored and unhappy. This was getting him nowhere except mildly drunk. At last he nodded to the bartender and went out into the street, reflecting that the steamy heat was almost a welcome change from the unfriendly atmosphere of the *Friendly Tavern*, which seemed seventy degrees cooler inside without benefit of air-conditioning.

Around the corner and two doors down was the Dixie Arms Hotel. Malone stood looking at it for a few minutes and then decided to go in.

There was a minute lobby, furnished with two wooden chairs and a tarnished spittoon, a staircase leading up, and a door which led into a tiny cubicle which evidently served as office. A bald-headed man sat at a flat-topped desk, and a big, sandy-haired plainclothesman was perched on one corner of it.

"Hi there, Klutchetsky," Malone said cheerfully.

The big cop swung around and greeted him with an amiable grin. "What you doing here, Malone?"

"Nothing," Malone said, hoping it wasn't the truth. "Just dropped by." He decided to plunge in. "Lee Merchant's my client, and I understand that the gun that shot Judge Kramer got the babe upstairs here."

"You understand entirely too good, Malone," Klutchetsky said, but still grinning. "Why don't you go home?"

Malone said, "Duty to my client. How about a look at the room?" He held out a couple of cigars.

"Thanks, Malone," Klutchetsky said. The bald man nodded and grunted something. The big cop slid off the desk and said, "No reason why not." As they started up the stairs, he added, "Just one flight

up. You got anything on this J. Brown?"

"Not a thing," Malone lied. "You got anything on Turk Greene?"

"Von Flanagan says—" Klutchetsky stopped suddenly.

They reached the door before Malone said, "He says what?"

"He says you shoulda died in your cradle," Klutchetsky said, and opened the door.

7.

The room didn't tell him anything, but that was what he had expected. He looked thoughtfully at the bed. It had been left untouched. The pillows in their greyish cases were undisturbed, and the spread was still smooth save for the one corner where the body had left an indentation and what was now a dried, dark brown blood stain.

"Fingerprints?" he said, not caring much.

"Uh-huh," Klutchetsky said. "All over the place. Everybody who'd been here since the joint was built. Prints on the beer bottles could've been J. Brown's." He paused, said, "Or would you say a greenish-brown," and laughed loudly.

"Who cares?" Malone said in a cross voice. "And tell von Flanagan he talks too much."

No, the room had nothing to say to him, nothing that he didn't already know. Art, Jack, or Jerry? But it didn't have to be any one of them. He began to feel very tired.

"Malone," Klutchetsky said, "What gives with this knock-out drops thing?"

"Just a hunch," the little lawyer said, and let it go at that. Charlie Bekker had to be dead to the world when the shot was fired, and apparently Susy had to be doped so she wouldn't make any disturbance when the killer came in the room. Another inartistic, inept, and in this case, unnecessary touch, Malone felt. There would always have been the chance some curious autopsy surgeon would look beyond the obvious.

"Seen enough," he said at last, and went wearily down the stairs. He waved goodbye to Klutchetsky, walked to Clark Street and hailed another taxi, this time giving an address on Lakeshore Drive. Not only, he reflected unhappily, was this case going to be strictly on the house, from the look of things now, but he was paying his own cab fare from a bankroll that was running low.

8.

The address was a famous one, but here the atmosphere was as warm as the weather outside and much more agreeable. The elevator boy grinned broadly, said, "What's new, Malone?" and shot up to Max Hook's floor without asking a question nor raising an eyebrow.

The big gambler's floor had been redecorated again within the past

month, Malone noticed. This time he thought he detected a faintly Persian influence in the rose and gold draperies, and the designs on the over-stuffed cushions on the floor. But Max Hook, a quivering mountain of a man, still sat behind the battered, golden oak, roll-top desk that had come with him in a series of moves from the West Side, and survived a long series of highly expensive interior decorators.

Max Hook pushed an enamelled box of pink-tinted, gold-tipped cigarettes toward Malone, smiled affably at his old friend, and said, "Something?"

Malone shook his head, reached for a cigar, and said, "I am here in the interests of justice. Or maybe injustice, I don't know. Hank Toffa."

Max Hook offered a gilt and crystal dish of chocolates, was declined, offered a choice of drinks that included the exotic and was asked for a gin and beer instead, and finally said, "Not a friend of mine."

"Nor mine," Malone said cheerfully. "No enemy, either. But that's beside the point. As far as you're concerned—?" He paused delicately.

"A competitor," Max Hook said. "A nuisance." He paused to sip delicately at his gin-and-grenadine. He shrugged his shoulders, said "Too bad the Citizens Committee can't touch him," and looked inquiringly at Malone.

"Too bad indeed," Malone said, this time with a cheerfulness he was beginning to feel. He briefly and quickly outlined the situation starting with the murder of Judge Kramer, and ending with the night's events, or lack of them. "Well?" he finished.

Max Hook scowled heavily and said, "Hank Toffa ain't the only guy can fix up an easy rap and a quick parole." He threw the grenadine mixture into the waste-basket, poured himself straight gin with a beer chaser, and said, "How much plus what, Malone?"

"Lee Merchant's a nice guy and pretty soon he's going to have a wife to support, and he might like to start a nice little business away from Chicago," the lawyer said lazily, "and he must be bored with sitting in the county jail by this time. Besides, his girl's lonesome. Under certain circumstances he might be willing to confide, more-or-less officially, who offered him money and a reduction to a manslaughter charge to keep his trap shut and let the Judge Kramer killing be cleared up."

"How much money?" Max Hook demanded.

"Fifteen thousand," Malone told him, seeing no point in saying only ten.

"Hell, that's peanuts," Max Hook rumbled, and Malone wished he'd said twenty. "If it's going to be worth it to me I'll meet it, and Georgie la Cerra will fix up an

alibi for him—if he needs it, with a smart lawyer like you and the fact that this Susy broad was shot with the same gun."

"He won't," Malone said confidently. "Now if some guy was arrested on a charge of, say, assault with intent to kill, and if the blonde babe's murder turned out to be a simple matter of manslaughter, and if the same turned out to be true of Turk Greene's murder, once the body is found, and if there were a slight consideration involved, Hank Toffa's name would undoubtedly be mentioned in the ensuing conversation, and everyone including the police department and the Citizen's Committee would be very happy about the whole affair. Neither one gives a hoot about some little punk of a hired killer, they want Toffa and the whole works."

"Double what Toffa was going to pay Lee Merchant," Max Hook said. He smiled happily and clasped his chubby hands over his belly. "It'll make Hank Toffa look like a damn piker. Not that he'll care by that time. Brother, once they do get him, he's *got*. Think you can do it, Malone?"

"Simplest little thing in the world," Malone told him, hoping it was the truth. "Now if I may use your phone—"

He called Lola and suggested that she drop in at the *Friendly Tavern*, order a drink on top of the too many she would appear to have already had, and announce to everybody within hearing distance that shooting her friend Susy was the work of a dirty dog and that she knew who it was, and furthermore Susy had told her everything about everything and given her the proof. "And prepare to duck fast."

He called Joe the Angel and suggested that it might make for a pleasant evening all around if a few of his relatives would drop in at the *Friendly Tavern* for a few beers and would try to remember which side they were on just in the event any trouble should start. "And quit complaining about my giving the *Friendly Tavern* all my trade. You'll get enough of it later."

Finally he called von Flanagan and suggested that if a prowl car should happen to be in the vicinity of the *Friendly Tavern*, and if its occupants should happen to notice and keep and eye on Lola Beck, and if there should be any arrest made, it might make for a far more satisfactory situation all around. He added a few details, leaving out only the name of Max Hook. "And stop telling me to mind my own business in the future."

He thought for a long time and then said, "One more thing." He called a certain judge at his home, tried him again at the *Chez Paree*, and reached him at last at a poker game in a Loop Hotel. It would be handy, he said, if he had a writ ready for immediate use in the matter of Lee Merchant. He gave even fewer details than he had von

Flanagan, but they were sufficient.

"Too bad I already got a smart lawyer," Max Hook said.

"Too bad I wouldn't take you for a client," Malone said.

They exchanged the smile of two men who had understood each other perfectly for a long time.

9.

The *Friendly Tavern* seemed just as unsociable but a lot more noisy when Malone finally reached it. The little lawyer sat down as inconspicuously as he could at the end of the bar nearest the door and ordered gin and beer. He glanced around and noted three di Angelo cousins sharing a table and a bottle of wine. Art, the third of the trio Charlie Bekker had described, had joined his pals. There were a few other customers whom Malone decided were innocent bystanders. The bartender was as dour and taciturn as before.

Lola sat a few stools down the bar, glaring at her drink. Her voice could be heard easily over the clamor of the juke-box. The voice with a snarl, Malone decided.

"An' that isn't all I know. Y' think I'm gonna do somethin' 'about it? Y'damned right. Y'think I'm jus' gonna' sit here an' do nuthin'? Y'damned wrong."

Suddenly she knocked the glass across the bar, got to her feet, and glared impartially around the room. "Susy was m' frien', see?"

Her walk to the door was a judicious combination of a swagger and a stagger. Malone admired it.

No one seemed to leave the barroom in a hurry, but it was empty except for the innocent bystanders by the time Malone had finished his drink and decided it was time to follow. This was going to be one that called for purely spectator participation on his part, Malone decided. He laid half of what was left of the bankroll on the bar, strolled out to the dark street and began to amble, idly and casually, in the general direction of Lola's red dress, noting with satisfaction that she was not entirely alone. Two figures, one tall, one medium height, were half a block behind her, catching up gradually without seeming to hurry, and the di Angelos were handily just across the street.

Another medium height figure appeared from a doorway, one with sleek black hair. That would be Jerry, the lawyer thought. He stepped up and said, "What's the deal, Malone?"

Malone paused, scribbled something on a scrap of paper and said, "If I were you, I'd make one. Thirty grand, a manslaughter rap, and here's the telephone number."

Jerry hesitated a moment, took the scrap of paper, and said, "What's in it for you, Malone?"

"Nothing, so far," Malone said.

It was at that moment that trouble started up ahead. Jerry

swore, stuffed the scrap of paper in his pocket, and raced up the street, whether to render aid and assistance to his pals or to make sure he got his cut of the thirty grand, Malone didn't know nor, at that moment, care.

At a distance it was hard to tell what was going on, and Malone hurried up the street. Close up, it was even harder to tell. Art, the other medium-sized one, had his gun out. Lola had ducked to one side. The di Angelos had joined in, and everybody appeared to be hitting everybody else with indiscriminate and unprejudiced enthusiasm. The hell with spectator sports, Malone decided in a hurry, and with creating unequal odds. He threw away his cigar, drew a long breath, and dove in happily.

A prowl car whisked around the corner, followed immediately by an official-looking black limousine, and everything was over. By the time Malone picked himself up from the sidewalk and made an ineffectual attempt to brush himself off, Art, Jack and Jerry had been tucked neatly into the prowl car, the di Angelos had discreetly disappeared, and von Flanagan was waving furiously at him to get into the limousine.

The little lawyer wedged himself in between Lola and von Flanagan in the back seat, and complained bitterly, "At least you could have waited until I hit someone."

"If there weren't a lady present," von Flanagan said, "I'd tell you something. And now would you mind telling me what it's about?"

"If you'll wait until I get a cigar lighted," Malone said, "I'll give you a chapter-by-chapter, blow-by-blow run-down, with nothing missing." Well, practically nothing. He turned to Lola and said admiringly, "A very nice piece of acting."

"Inna pig's eye tha' was actin'," Lola said. She rested her head on his shoulder and went to sleep.

Malone leaned back, lit his cigar, and drew a long breath. The rest would be routine. As for him, he had exactly fifty cents cash money in his pocket. The pleasant effects of the gin and beer were wearing off. And he was very, very tired now.

10.

It was mid-afternoon of the next day when he leaned across the bar and said to Joe the Angel, "And then on top of everything else, cleaning up in the poker game, and Lee Merchant insisting on paying me five hundred bucks fee, there comes in this messenger boy." He took the check out of his pocket and gazed at it lovingly. "Did I show you the check from the Citizens' Committee?"

"Three times in the last hour," Joe the Angel said, polishing a glass.

The little lawyer sighed and put the check away reluctantly. "Have I paid up my bar bill?"

"For the fourth time, yes," Joe the Angel said. "Also you paid me back the forty bucks you borrowed last night to get into that poker game."

"Then give me another gin and beer," Malone said. "Did I show you my tickets for Bermuda?" He took out the envelope.

"Five times," Joe the Angel said, refilling the glass. "And they are not for Bermuda, Malone, they are for Hawaii."

"Practically the same place," Malone assured him cheerfully. He waved his cigar and said, "First vacation in m'life."

He looked contentedly into his gin. Everything had gone quickly and smoothly. With the inspiring thought of Max Hook's thirty grand the three had talked with enthusiasm, giving times, places and names, giving Art as Susy's slayer (the gun had gone off in a struggle) describing Turk Greene's final resting place and its exact location and, most important of all sparing no details as to who arranged for Judge Kramer's untimely end. They had offered proof and signed statements. Hank Toffa's battery of expensive legal talents was unhappily getting a little less than nowhere, and Hank Toffa was no longer a competitor and a nuisance to Max Hook.

The poker game had turned out to be a magnificent investment, and in the morning Lee Merchant had come in the office to insist on paying a five-hundred-dollar fee for legal services and to invite Malone to be best man at the wedding, and to ask Malone's advice about investing in a small candy store "with wire services" outside of Cicero.

And finally there had been the reward from a grateful Citizens' Committee.

Malone smiled happily and said, "Did I show you the check—"

"Yes!" Joe the Angel said in a weary voice.

It was then that a new customer came into the bar and sat down near Malone. He ordered a beer and said, "I'm from Cincinatti, and I was told someone here might know where I could find a lawyer by the name of John J. Malone—"

Malone and Joe the Angel both started to speak. Malone caught the other's eye, shook his head almost imperceptibly, and said quickly, "*Who?*"

"Malone," the newcomer said. "John J. Malone. I've a very important case I'd like to have him handle, and—"

A brief but bitter struggle went on in Malone's mind, curiosity battling with visions of white sandy beaches and sun-tanned blondes.

"Bermuda, wait for me," the little lawyer murmured. Or was it Hawaii? Didn't matter.

"What was that?" the newcomer asked.

"Sorry," Malone told him. "But let me buy you a drink. Very sorry I can't help you. But you see, I'm a stranger here myself."

Creese picked up his whiskey and drank it. "Meaning me? The oldtime illegal criminal versus the modern legal criminal. Is that the picture?"

LOSER'S CHOICE

A
Novelette

BY
NELSON ADCOCK

The fourth floor of the Paxton House had a thick carpeted plush hallway complete with rubber plants, a series of abstract paintings on the long ochre walls, and, at the end, overlooking the boulevard, the park, and the river, a big picture-window, eight-foot square. Neatly placed before the window was an orange-cushioned, black wrought-iron bench.

A thick-set, bullnecked, flat-faced man sat on the bench reading a folded newspaper. As George Creese stepped from one of the chrome and plastic trimmed elevators into the hallway, the man looked up. He raised an arm that had been hanging more or less limply at his side and stuck a half smoked unlit cigar between his lips, unconsciously sucking on it while he watched Creese. Creese did not notice the man at all; instead, he turned to look at the green-paneled elevator doors as they ran together and formed an almost invisible crack. Their closing so tightly seemed to commit him to some half-unwilling action—as if there was to be no turning back now. He looked away from the doors, shifted from one foot to the other, wiped his damp palms on his worn but still serviceable overcoat, and squinted near-sightedly down the long line of doors. Creese was not wearing spectacles although a pair of shallow red ridges on the top sides of his nose suggested that he normally did. He licked his lower lip anxiously while he strained to see.

Meanwhile, the husky man on the

bench, apparently satisfied, dropped his own eyes back to his newspaper; but held them at an angle that permitted him, by the merest flicking movement, to observe George Creese. The unlit cigar and the hand holding it dropped back limply to the man's side.

Creese took a pack of Chesterfields from his overcoat pocket and with a hand that trembled slightly hung a cigarette on his damp lower lip. Then he fumbled a couple seconds with a paper match-packet. When it came the fire reflected bright yellow light on the gray skin of Creese's much-lined, deeply scored face. It was a face that had once been handsome in a lean, hard, hawklike way; the battered crooked nose had always been oversize, but its line once was classically modeled; and the deep-set eyes that now squinted originally were penetrating and keen. Creese's mouth—a drooping, sullen line, dented and folded at the corners—was formerly well-shaped and had crested a square, firm, prepossessing jaw. The jaw itself had suffered and changed least; it still thrust forward doggedly, had the remnants of lean hardness, and seemed determined to testify to the lost character of its owner.

While he stood smoking the cigarette, Creese wished that instead of spending his last seventy-five cents for an egg and potato breakfast he'd invested in a triple hooker of whiskey. The food had filled and comforted his stomach, but did nothing for his raw-edged, tingling nerves. Cheap bar whiskey, three or four shots of it, was needed to bring those shaking anxious nerves into line. Only a desperate, quixote desire to be his old normal self had made Creese buy food instead of alcohol, and now he regretted the sudden attempt to reform. It had been inspired by the fact that Creese was unwilling to admit to himself that he needed the support of whiskey to face Wendy. The logical part of him knew it; knew quite well that after months of booze, a twilight life between half-waking sleep and half-sleeping wakefulness, he couldn't stop short. Not even to see Wendy. But a deeper part of Creese, beyond logic and reason, had insisted he at least try. He'd yielded to the nagging of that deeper part. Conscience and pride. Creese cursed his pride. It wasn't helping him now while he stood trembling a dozen yards or so from Wendy's door.

There was a chrome-banded, tubular steel ash-stand by the elevator doors. Creese threw the partly smoked cigarette into it, shook his head, and felt the knot of his tie to see if it was tight in the V of his collar. It wasn't and he adjusted it. Then he took a black plastic case from an inner pocket and removed a pair of circular-lensed, steel-rimmed glasses. They were the efficient, plain-looking, completely out-of-style sort dispensed in free clin-

ics. Creese carefully hooked them behind his ears. He blinked as the world of the hallway jumped into sharp focus. His eyes rested a moment on the seated man in front of the big window, then moved along the line of doors. He walked quickly down the hall and stopped before the door marked 420. His finger went out to a small plastic button set flush in the wood, then hesitated and drew back.

At that moment the man on the bench chose to speak. "Hold it, Creese." His voice was low, but the tone carried strongly. It came right across the hall and struck Creese with the impact of a bullet. Creese turned.

"C'mere a second," the man said.

Creese shoved the hand that had reached for the bell into his coat pocket and walked past the doors to the window at the hall's end. Two feet in front of the man, who remained seated on the bench, he stopped and let his gaze drift out the window toward the city—or at what was certainly the best part of the city. For all the attention Creese gave the man, beyond the briefest of glances, he might not have been there at all.

"You're Creese, ain't you?" The man on the bench busied himself examining Creese's face and clothing. His words now had a tone of contempt—a decided sneer.

The view from the window was the West Side of the city. The West Side with its boulevard, modeled on a famous French one, its green-banked winding river, its huge park, and, out beyond the park's fringes, its colony of estates and mansions. The tight ritzy West Side that consisted of Riverville, Steeltown, and the Jungle. It opposed them and lived off them like the quiet refined parasite that it was. Or it had in Creese's day. It had lived off the merchants of Riverville, the mills of Steeltown, and on the organized vice and corruption of the Jungle. Nobody had been closer to the whole set-up than Creese. He knew the Jungle better than he knew his ABC's; he knew the bars, the pool halls, the dance-joints, the brothels, and the gambling-dens. He'd been born amongst them. A kid in the dirty streets of the Jungle, he'd taken the basic-training: lie, cheat, steal, fight, and, above all, get the other mucker before he got you. When caught, clam up. Nobody had learned the lessons better than Creese.

"I asked if you're George Creese," the seated man said. This time his tone was sharp. He put his newspaper to one side of the bench and drew back his coat, hooking his thick thumbs into the sides of his wide leather belt. The movement exposed a police-shield clipped to his shirt-pocket and the polished bakelite butt of a short-barreled .38 Colt revolver suspended in a pigskin shoulder harness. His lips were drawn back in a humorless, fixed

smile showing the start of some gold dental work at the sides. His jaw was flat, square, massive, and badly shaved, displaying blue patches on the vast neck area under the chin.

In spite of his trembling nerves and the sense of shame he felt for having been unable to push the button and face up to Wendy, Creese gave a little grin as he watched the gray river.

"I'm Creese," he answered quietly, still looking at the river rather than the man. He knew that a little further down—further than could be seen from the window—the river would turn and shoot sharply to the east for a quarter mile and become the dock area of Riverville. And across the river from that would be Steeltown. A couple square miles of red-brick and cement-walled mills, soot, heat, and pounding noise. And thousands of little boxlike houses jammed in tight rows, with peepholes for windows, where the humans who labored in the mills lived. Creese knew Riverville and Steeltown. It was there he first ran a book for Long-Arm Louie Armeda when he'd advanced to the rank of lieutenant in that old-time gangster's organization. Later, Creese had put a .45 bullet between Long-Arm Louie's eyes and had taken over the whole operation. He'd dumped Louie's body in the very river he now watched; no doubt the bones were still there, wrapped in rusted towing chains, mingled with river-mud and factory silt. That had happened thirty years ago. Rest in peace, Louie, thought Creese.

And the swank West Side at which he directly looked—Creese knew that well too. Far in the distance, beyond the river, he could see a square of green, some tufts of trees, a bit of gray granite wall, and a sloping series of pink stone roofs. Eden. He'd built Eden twenty years ago. The biggest, finest estate of the West Side; a modern fairy palace dreamed up by the fabulous architect, Claude Wynne, to suit the fancy of Creese's bride, Wendy. Wendy, the governor's daughter, loveliest debutante of the season; Creese had gotten her because he was handsome, reckless, and dashing—and because his organization owned the governor body and soul. But Wendy never knew that. Or, if she did, she'd never betrayed the knowledge by hint or action.

Creese sighed, moving his eyes from the view of Eden. He thought of the organization that had made him rich enough to built it. A fine, smooth-running empire it had been, and one with a tremendous yield. It had included complete control of the state politics, the press, the radio, the labor scene, and the slickest running gambling combine east of the Mississippi River. All Creese's. Everything his eye could see had been potentially his—a word into his telephone put any-

thing into his hands. He'd been the peer of men like Capone, Schultz, and Diamond, big men who owned and ran things, no matter what the movies, newspaper supplements, and fink cops said. Indeed, some of the most important men in the country, from Washington and the underworld alike, had dined and wined and made deals in Eden. They had been great times.

"Not very polite, are you?" the man on the bench sneered at Creese. "So you're *Big* George Creese? Lemme tell you something, *Big* George Creese—if you're here looking for trouble, you'll get it plenty. You understand that?"

Trouble. Creese knew all about that word. One morning the whole empire had gone to pieces. Just like that. The big heat came and everybody wanted out and nobody could seem to talk enough. It had happened all over—New York, Chi, L.A., Detroit—all of a sudden every mayor, police-commissioner, publisher, punk-cop, stoolie, and newsboy was crying to spill his guts and tell Washington and the world what he knew. Some kind of crazy neurotic urge to confess, that was what really made the big heat, not the square-johns or the crusaders. But whatever the reason, it happened and it happened fast. Heads fell at every level and in every direction; and when the showdown came on the West Side, it was Creese or the governor—Wendy's father. Big George Creese took the fall. He took it partly because at first it had promised not to be so bad; with money poured in the right direction, a battery of high-powered lawyers, and with a multitude of technicalities, the indications were that he would get off with only the loss of the organization and a good chunk of his fortune. But it hadn't worked that way. As soon as the wedge was in, the reform elements pushed to the limit. Creese ended up practically broke and with a twenty-year rap staring him in the face. It was a bad fall. Good behavior had shortened the sentence, but not by much. Creese was too big, too much in the public's eye, too notorious, to do much less than the whole trick.

"I understand." Creese looked at the seated man. "I'm not here to make trouble. I told Captain Manners that at the railroad station."

The man stood up, letting his coat resume its normal position. "I know what you told Manners. You'll tell me again if I ask. You'll sing out when I ask. Understand?"

Creese's eyes left the man; went back to the window. Yes, it had been a bad fall. And he was still falling. He looked at the gray river and thought how impersonal and unconcerned it was; he'd plugged Long-Arm Louie and others and dumped the starey-eyed stiffs into that gray river. It didn't care a damn. Not a damn. Still falling and he well knew it. But the bottom was getting near now and

there was no stopping. From the clouds down to the ashcan—one hell of a long fall. Shitheel, punk cops gave him guff now. Biggest moment of the thickheaded bull's life; something he could tell his grandchildren—how he'd once made Big George Creese toe the mark. Creese sighed and took his eyes from the window.

"I understand," he said, thinking how well he did understand—now. He'd been a sap. The governor had only lived a couple years after the shake-up. Nerves shot, semi-paralyzed, he'd sat in a wheelchair writing an autobiography full of absurd lies. He might as well have done it in a prison hospital and Creese would have been free to look after Wendy. And he could have salvaged something; not much maybe, but something. Enough to make some kind of start. In a pinch he could have gone legit; opened a string of dry-cleaning joints or a couple taprooms. Creese shook his head—too late for that now. He'd mulled this stuff over ten-thousand times during the past twenty-years and the answer always came out the same. Too late. He'd goofed and goofed bad—just that one time and that was all it took.

"Turn around and put up your hands," the cop ordered.

Creese did it. The cop frisked him and found no weapon. "Clean, eh?" he grunted. "All right, what do you want here?"

"Can I put my hands down?"

"Yeah. Answer my question."

Lowering his hands, Creese said wearily, "You know why I'm here. To see Mrs. Raymond Warren." He pointed a finger and added, "Apartment 420."

"See her about what?"

Creese shrugged. "She wrote me, asking me to call. I don't know more than that. We were divorced almost twenty years ago. I told the Captain all this. I guess he told you. I guess he sent you here."

The cop grinned his unpleasant grin, mouth gaping at the sides. "You're a real guessing boy. Yeah, a real guesser." He went back to the bench, sat down on it, and looked up at Creese with hard, narrowed eyes. "Creese, you're not wanted in this town. You won't be able to sneeze around here, but what we'll know it. Get smart and clear out." The cop leaned back on his elbows and fingered his heavy jaw with a thumb. "That's official. Now, this is personal. They tell me you're a big shot. Tough. Well, Creese, you look like a plain winobum to me. I think you're a waste of time. Got that?"

Creese let ten seconds go by in silence, then asked, "Is that it? Can I make my call now?" His voice was quiet and dull; his eyes showed only tired resignation.

The cop nodded and chuckled. He put the unlit cigar in his mouth. "Yeah, go ahead. *Big* George Creese—Jesus!"

Saying nothing to this, Creese went back and pushed the bell-button at the door of Wendy's apartment. He held himself rigid. After an interval of a few seconds, the door opened and Creese faced a young Negro maid dressed in shiny black stuff, a little white cap, and an abbreviated white apron. She smiled.

"George Creese to see Mrs. Warren," Creese said, controling the throb he felt deep down in his throat. Even after twenty years, calling Wendy "Mrs. Warren" hurt and hurt bad.

"Yes sir." The maid stood aside. "She's expecting you. This way, please."

Creese followed the maid into a room decorated in gray, pale blue, and orange; telling himself as he entered that a name shouldn't hurt after so many years. Naturally Wendy had remarried—he'd encouraged her to do so himself. That she might spend twenty-years waiting for him was unthinkable; he had told her to take what was left and begin a new life. And, half unwillingly—or so Creese believed—she had done it.

The maid indicated a comfortable-looking fat leather chair, but Creese barely started to sit in it when he jumped up hastily. From an inner doorway, a well proportioned woman of medium height dressed in a simple gown of quiet green satin fabric entered. Her clear gray eyes fell upon Creese, looked enquiringly at him a moment, and then joined her mouth in a warm, pleasant smile. She came forward, extending both hands, moving gracefully with her head tilted at a high angle that emphasized a beautiful crown of ash blonde hair. Above the hollow of her breasts, revealed by the square cut bodice of the gown and suspended by a thin platinum chain, hung a single, perfectly cut emerald. Creese's eyes dropped to the flashing jewel as the woman came near.

"George!" she cried. "Oh, I'm glad to see you!" The words were rich in feeling, sincere, even exuberant, but—controled. The woman recognized her emotions, gave them play, but was their master.

A host of feelings—all conflicting—rushed through Creese's mind. A great flood of shame ran its course first. This beautiful woman had been his; whatever the reasons, whatever the excuse, the simple objective facts added up to one thing—failure. Creese had lost his power, his fortune, and his woman. This feeling was followed by a stabbing jealousy and self-pity. Obviously life and the passing years had treated Wendy very gently indeed. All the vivaciousness of the young girl was still there; the gray eyes were brimming with life and the clear creamy skin of Wendy's face was practically unlined. All that gracious living, human reason, and care could provide had been hers; no wrinkle or blemish

marred her beauty. The barriers of class, wealth, and—perhaps most important of all—a certain detachment had insulated and protected her perfectly from the world. This detachment, an unaffected inbred stoicism, not to be confused with mere indifference, was a baffling quality Creese had never fully understood in his ex-wife and the people of her intimate circle. Sometimes he believed that that, above all things, had prompted him to take the fall. Saving the old governor at such a terrible price, foolishly making a martyr of himself—hadn't he really done it because the whole situation presented itself as a key to Wendy's inner being? The being behind the detachment? Had he made the sacrifice in a desperate, childish attempt to *really* possess her? In that case it wasn't a sacrifice at all; it was a technique, a method. A chill worked down Creese's spine. In that case, what would taking the fall have meant, the prison rap, if he hadn't gone all the way? Right down to the ashcan? Creese swallowed hard and blinded out the line of thought while a dull ache gripped way down in his throat.

But that wasn't the end. Immediately on the heels of these suppressed ideas, Creese felt a helpless raging hate coupled with its opposite, an inexpressible love. He hated himself and he loved Wendy. And the feelings existed within an awareness of impotence and meaninglessness that was like nothing but a blank void. Just grim, frozen, blank nothing and he and his thoughts were lost in it. The hate was ineffective and without power; the love was a light he could no longer even see; it existed a thousand miles up and out of the darkness, where he would never go, completely and absolutely beyond reach forever. It was past all regret, anxiety, or speculation. Everything lost being in this dark vacuum. Creese's thoughts could center on nothing except the useless refrain that the past was past, and the hate and love were completely blocked. This condition made him less than human; less than alive even: he was a *thing,* recorded, labeled, and filed away, with all being in the past. A hunk of matter, all drawn into itself, floating in a black ocean of nothing.

The previous thoughts he'd pushed aside, bad as they were, were better than this.

Then, still looking at Wendy, Creese experienced the final effect. He resigned mentally. It didn't matter. The plain evident fact was that nothing mattered; this utter dejected resignation barely had vitality enough to recognize itself, but at least it was painless. There was no use trying to deceive or fool Wendy; she could see clearly what he was—the months of continuous running and hiding and drinking were etched like an advertisement on his face; were symbolised in his

whole attitude, and were manifested in his furtive fear-ridden manner of walking the streets in daylight, a process he avoided as much as he could. He'd become a timid animal of night, held loosely together by alcohol and a vague something that was ultimately nothing and hardly worth bothering about. No front or pretense could hide all this.

Cold sweat oozed from his hands as Wendy gripped them warmly. Physical contact with her was a reproach, a judgment, and a condemnation.

"Dear, dear George," Wendy said in warm, intimate tones. "It was good of you to come. After all the years, when I need you so badly. Please take off your coat—here, let Greta have it."

A misty fog-bubble seemed to form round George. Somewhere outside of it hands divested him of his hat and overcoat. He needed? Wendy needed him badly? *Anybody* needed him? My God, even the booze-merchants, most democratic of men, didn't want his trade anymore. In his nervous, confused condition he'd misheard the words. He struggled to cut through the fog-bubble.

"You're looking swell, Wendy." Stupid, trite words; but all he could manage. He gulped and added, "No different than the day I saw you last, twenty-years ago." His eyes dropped to the emerald at Wendy's throat and he tried to smile, hardly knowing if he succeeded or not. "You still have that little trinket." The words came out in a tone that almost implied possession of the emerald was a fault or a weakness—even a danger; that the gem might be a source of contamination.

"Of course." Wendy's long pink-nailed fingers moved gently to the valley of her breasts, touching the clear green stone. "Your first gift to me. Do you think I'd ever part with it? Ever?" She paused with the words and a slightly curious, veiled look came over her eyes; they lowered to Creese's cheap tie, his frayed collar, and to his jacket. The shoulders of the jacket were padded, the lapels quite wide, and it had only two buttons; which things clearly marked it long out of style. And when Wendy brought her eyes up to Creese's they contained surprise and concern. A note of anxiety entered her voice. "Please, let's sit down, George." She took his arm in both her hands. "Over here, on the sofa."

Creese went willingly enough. Seated there, with Wendy at his side, half-turned toward him, he was content to await her next words. She'd sent for him. She saw what he was. The worst was over.

"Are you all right?" Wendy asked. "Your health, I mean?"

"Yes. My eyes were giving me some trouble, but I got these new glasses. Now that should stop."

"But when you wrote—"

"Just after I came out of jail?"

"Yes. You said you were in Chicago and had made certain connections. You had certain opportunities. I have the letter in my desk. I—"

Creese smiled. "No need, Wendy. I remember the letter. Every word. I didn't take the job. Some guys I met in jail had connections in a big Chicago outfit and they wanted me to come in. Gambling, prostitution, and dope. Also a murder-for-hire syndicate—which is the part they wanted me to handle. I'd have been a high-class burner."

Wendy's eyebrows arched. "A burner?"

"A red-hot. A killer."

"But you're not that," Wendy objected. "You headed a crime organization, but—"

Creese's tone was flat. "I've killed men."

"Oh." Wendy gave the word no inflection: it was neutral.

"I didn't take the job." Creese's mouth went grim. "I don't know why I didn't. Unless I've just gone soft. It would have meant about two-grand a month at the start and it's a good tight outfit—plenty of protection in high places." Creese shook his head. "Anyway, I didn't go in."

"But what have you been doing?" Wendy looked puzzled.

"You'll laugh. For a while I worked in a restaurant—a hash-house—dish-washing and mopping the floors. Lately, the past few months I've been doing nothing. I think a lot; if you can call that doing anything. Thinking—" Creese sighed—"it's a habit I picked up in the can—in jail. Also—you might as well know the worst—I've been drinking. Something else I never did before." Creese's eyes rested on a large oil-painting that hung between a pair of draped windows. The windows admitted soft, filtered light. He nodded at the painting and said, "I remember that picture. It was the governor's favorite. It always looked a little crooked to me, like the land was going to fold up over the houses."

Wendy nodded and her expression lightened. "Yes, the Utrillo. Father bought it when he was a very young man touring France. It's come to be quite valuable now; Maurice Utrillo has been elevated to a high place in Modern French Art. But—" Wendy's face became concerned again—"this Chicago organization—is it big and powerful?"

"Biggest in the country."

"You haven't lost connections with it? I mean—" Wendy hesitated—"you still know the people? The leaders?"

It was Creese's turn to look curious. "Yes, I know them. I dropped out of sight, but—" he shrugged indifferently—"I didn't burn any bridges, if that's what you mean. I can't. In that world, Wendy, I'll be Creese till I die." His eyes moved back to the painting and he added,

"I never knew anything about that stuff. Painting, books, music—but I don't have to tell you that. Funny, I tried a couple times in the old days to understand what it was all about—you remember—the concerts and the books—it never seemed to make much sense. Vague. Even kind of crazy. But now—" Creese paused and smiled —"I guess the governor never saw much more in me than a tough, clever hoodlum. And I guess not so tough or so clever at that. Maybe—" he nodded again at the painting— "that's the kind of thing that matters in the end. It seems to hold up anyway."

"But," Wendy said, looking perplexed, "you have intelligence and great qualities for leadership. I can't understand you just doing nothing. Of course, I realize you need something behind you. Look —" Wendy touched Creese's hand —"would you accept some money? Working capital? My goodness, you left me with enough. I have the proceeds from the sale of Eden, father's legacy, and Dan—"

Creese's hand went rigid under Wendy's. Dan Warren. Wendy's husband. A prominent publisher, he owned the *Star,* one of the city's biggest papers. Creese knew instinctively what he would be like —a college man, Yale or Harvard, bred of good family, adjusted to all the good things as a matter of course, traveled in Europe—he would know about paintings and music and books. The kind of guy who's loaded up to the ears with character; *he* wouldn't end up a drunk in the ash-can, no matter what the situation. He'd have a wall of detachment like Wendy; a barrier nothing could penetrate; things might hit him hard, but they'd never get to the real inside where the hard, tight knot of character existed. Creese shook his head from side to side, saying, "No, I don't want money. It's not that. The truth is I've been thinking too much, that's all. When a guy like me starts thinking what's right and what's wrong, he ends up doing nothing. I'll get moving soon. Of course, I'll never make it like I used to, but I'll do all right."

Uncertainty clouded Wendy's eyes as she heard this. "In offering you money, George, I wasn't being altogether unselfish."

"What's that mean, Wendy?"

"I told you I need your help."

"*My* help? Then you did say that?"

"Of course. And you came all the way from Chicago. I naturally thought—well, in view of your letter—"

Creese frowned. "I don't get it. I guess I'm pretty thick, but you'll have to spell it out."

"It's simple," Wendy replied, shrugging. "I assumed you had an organization. Or were directing one."

"You mean a mob?" Light dawned on Creese. "You mean you

want some kind of a *job* done? Yes, I see now—" Creese smiled with his heavy, lined mouth, but his eyes showed disappointment behind the glinting spectacles—"yes, I guess I'm the logical person for *that*. What kind of trouble are you in, Wendy?"

Wendy flushed and lowered her eyes. Reaching for a small, ebony-handled, silver bell that lay on a nearby service-table, she tinkled it once and the maid entered the room so promptly that Creese decided she must have been waiting for the summons. "I'd like a cocktail," Wendy said. "Something sweet, Greta, please." She turned from the maid to Creese, asking, "Whiskey for you, George? Bourbon? Plain with water?"

Bourbon, plain with water. That had been Creese's drink in the old days, on the rare occasions when he took alcohol in any form. "All right," he nodded and let his eyes follow the maid as she went from the room, watching her almost skin-tight skirt, her well rounded calves, and the high, shiny black heels on which she walked, but without really registering in his mind what he saw. His thoughts were on his next words. "I'll try to help you, Wendy. You know it. Tell me what's wrong."

"But you see," Wendy said, "it could work out both ways. For you and for me. You see—" she halted and suddenly took Creese's hand again. "Dear George! If you only could know. If I—" she stopped, caught her underlip with her teeth, and shook her head negatively—"no, it's too late for that. I mustn't be weak now." From the bodice of her gown she took a folded square of paper and handed it to Creese, saying, "Please read this, George. If I seem distracted or impolite, this will explain."

Surprised—for he had never thought of Wendy as capable of even thinking of herself as weak—Creese took the paper, noting with trembling fingers the slight warmth it still retained from Wendy's body. He opened the two folds and focused his eyes on some typewritten lines. They were terse and to the point.

Dear Mrs Warren: If you want to keep your husband alive you will influence him to reverse the Star's *political policy. He has been warned twice. Just think of what happened to Harry Chance and don't be a fool.*

The note was unsigned. Creese read the lines twice and raised his eyes. "Sounds like Ray's bucking somebody's game. What's it all about?"

"Harry Chance was the managing editor of Ray's paper, the *Star*," Wendy replied. "He was killed three weeks ago by a hit and run driver. The circumstances were such that it could only have been deliberate." Wendy paused, giving Creese a significant look as the maid reentered the room with a

tray containing a decanter and several glasses.

While the drinks were served, Creese let his thoughts run on. He considered that Ray Warren, the man who had his wife, had prestige, and had a great deal of money, was in trouble. Big trouble, if the note was to be believed. And he, Creese, who had neither Wendy, prestige, money, or even a future, was being asked to help. An ironic twist of fate, to say the least. Creese rubbed his jaw with a forefinger and suddenly thought of his old cellmate, Hickey Dooley, who'd been on a religious kick for years and was always talking about the "Man Upstairs" and how he dealt the cards and how it was up to you to play the hand out. Now it seemed to Creese—although he didn't believe for an instant in fatalism—that this hand he was uncovering had been dealt before. To him. And accepting Dooley's idea, for the moment, the action was a rerun. In fact, the old joke applied and he might very well get up from the couch, put on his hat and coat, and say, "This is where I came in." Creese smiled inwardly and then sighed. If Hickey Dooley's ideas were right, Creese's whole life had been lived just for the purpose of getting Wendy's menfolk out of hot water—first her father and now her husband. But why, for Jesus' sake? How deceptively easy it made things when you said they were "supposed" to happen—that they were "in the cards". As soon as you said it, no matter how lousy the hand, or bad the action, the pressure began to go off. The fault wasn't yours; it belonged to the Bearded Joker Upstairs who dealt the cards. Baloney.

Greta the maid, had gone from the room. Wendy was watching Creese holding her cocktail glass in one slender, smooth hand; a twinkle of pink and blue light danced in the finely drawn stem a little bit above the points where Wendy's fingertips rested. The journey from the point of light to her eyes was short; now they were clear, soft, gray; studying Creese, reading his mind perhaps . . .

Creese shifted his own eyes beyond Wendy's shoulder and looked past, to the far wall, where there was another painting. A brightly colored one he'd never seen before. Oranges and some kind of bright green fruit, limes or mangoes perhaps, in and surrounding a graceful white bowl. The background was deep midnight blue except for some bright yellow sparks that floated halfway between the fruit and the infinity behind it. There was a powerful, rough crudeness about the painting; and its immediate effect on Creese was to corroborate his very thought about Hickey Dooley's theory. Why, he didn't know, but the painting implied clearly that there was no such thing as fate. There were Wendy's and Creese's and Ray's and paintings,

and a host of other things, but none of them meant more than they simply *were*. All values, including the lack of values, came from inside. This truth was the thing Hickey Dooley's "Man Upstairs", strong whiskey, and the merry-go-round of everyday action hid.

Creese liked the painting and felt better for having seen it. It was a porthole opening onto reality; *real* reality. Things were neither more nor less than they were; actions began and ended with the actor. Creese could stand that. It made him guilty as hell, but at least he had substance. He picked up his whiskey and said, "To old times."

Wendy smiled and sipped from her glass. She put it down and smoothed her dress over her knees. Her feet were placed primly side by side and she folded her hands in her lap loosely. She said:

"The only really capable person I could think of in connection with the problem was you, George. I'm so glad my letter found you—the address I had was a hotel from which you wrote almost a year ago. Are you still living there?"

"It almost didn't reach me." Creese smiled. The generous sized drink of whiskey, strong bonded stuff, had gone directly to his ragged nerves, soothing them like magic. His eye rested on the small cut-glass decanter Greta had thoughtfully left on the serving-table. It was three-quarters full. "I was just leaving that hotel," he added, bringing his look round to Wendy, "the morning your letter came." It was true. The "hotel" was a South State Street flophouse and he'd been told by the manager to get out several days before Wendy's letter had arrived. Upon reading the letter, he'd gone directly to old Moses Shadrack's second-hand store, where, by dint of begging, pleading, and promising, he'd promoted an outfit of half-way presentable clothes and a few dollars in cash. That same afternoon he sold a pint of blood for five-dollars and managed to raise another five from a bartender in exchange for mopping up his floors and cleaning out an entire basementful of debris. By nightfall he was completely exhausted, but he took the train anyway. He slept fitfully, now and then nipping at a bottle of cheap wine concealed in a paper sack. After a long night in the coach, Creese reached his destination. He washed and shaved in the railroad station lavatory and then on the way out, to his surprise, he'd been collared by the police captain and questioned closely. Thinking of this, and of the cop out in the hall, made Creese ask, "Did you tell anybody you sent for me?"

"No." Surprise made Wendy forget Creese hadn't answered her question about where he was living.

"How about Ray? Did he know?"

"Yes." Wendy nodded.

"Then he told somebody. A cop met me at the station. And there's another out in your hall. Or there was when I came in."

Wendy looked frightened. "It might be coincidence. Perhaps you aroused the cop's suspicion. The first one, I mean."

"It's possible. But it's also possible Ray told someone."

Leaning forward, Wendy refilled Creese's glass from the whiskey decanter. She gave a little sigh. "Oh, anything's possible in this corrupt city! Ray has so many enemies he hardly knows where to turn. We can't trust anyone. We've had three different maids this year. You see how bold our opponents are—they post guards outside our very door."

Creese looked thoughtfully at the whiskey that had just been poured. He made no effort to reach for it. Instead, he asked, "Who are your husband's enemies?"

"The entire political machine of the city. You see, the *Star's* backing the reactionary reform candidate in the coming election."

"And this machine's a tight setup? Top to bottom? They knocked off this Chance guy and wrote you the note?"

"Oh yes. They've had everything their way since the war. There was a big population explosion in Riverville and the Jungle, and these people—the worst sort—have had the controling votes. Cavanaugh, the mayor, gives them anything and they keep him in office. Many good families have left the city altogether; real estate's declining all over, and the industry in Steeltown is way below normal. Throcton and Powers, the two biggest manufacturers, are moving operations to Sun City because the labor situation's impossible here. Nobody wants work when they can get on Cavanaugh's relief rolls or his political payroll. Most of the decent, real workers moved out of Steeltown when the Jungle overflowed. And now," Wendy shook her head slowly, "things have reached the stage where the remaining respectable citizens realize they must act. We have this man, Howard Conners, running on a reform ticket and Ray's backing him to the hilt with the *Star*. And he'll keep doing so, unless they kill him as they killed Harry Chance."

"Cavanaugh's mob," Creese said, frowning, "they must control the police too."

"Everything. Every judge, magistrate, and constable's on the payroll. City Hall's the headquarters of a syndicate that's been forming for twenty-years—ever since you left, in fact. Now the elected officials control and regulate crime like a corporate business. Ray has spent years trying to break down the structure in a legal way. Now—" a hard glint came into Wendy's eyes—"I believe another method might be appropriate."

Creese picked up his whiskey and drank it. "Meaning me? The

old-time illegal criminal versus the modern legal criminal. Is that the picture?"

Hesitating, Wendy said, "You might put it that way. I think of it like this: Ray's a philosopher, an idealist: you're a fighter and a born leader of men. You built an empire in this city once and I believe you could save it now. You're famous, you know, George. Quite often an article appears in a paper or magazine telling about you and the men of your time, the emphasis being that however violent and illegal your actions were, you were *men* and not overgrown, dirty, sadistic boys. I spoke to Harry Chance before he was killed and he agreed with me that you, of all people, might be able to do something. He remembered you well. He was a cub-reporter when you were at the zenith of your power."

Creese nodded. "And that was probably the leak. He must have told somebody and it got back to friend Cavanaugh."

"He wouldn't have done it intentionally," Wendy protested.

"It doesn't matter." Creese stared directly into Wendy's widespaced gray eyes. "You really believe I could break up this combine?" Without realizing, he'd clenched his right hand, which lay in his lap, into a hard, leathery-skinned, blue-veined ball. White splotches showed where the large rawboned knuckles pressed violently under the skin. The fist trembled.

Wendy's tone put conviction in her words. It was as if she couldn't understand Creese doubting himself. "Why certainly. Nobody ever beat you, George."

That simple. And it was true. The only one who'd ever beaten him was himself. Things were just as he'd thought they were while looking at the painting. He'd allowed himself to dissolve away in alcohol; he'd determined to take the fall for the governor; he and he alone was letting himself sink down into the gutters of skid-row. It was true; nobody had ever beat him. He'd thrown in the sponge and beaten himself. He'd quit.

Again Creese thought of Hickey Dooley and his prattle about the "Man Upstairs". Carry that idea to its logical conclusion and a guy was beaten before he was born. Bunk. Wendy saw him objectively, and she was right—nobody had beaten him. Creese glanced quickly at the still-life painting with the oranges, as if seeking reassurance. According to the prison psychologist—another nut like Dooley and one who'd evinced a strange interest in Creese—according to him, Creese had been molded, beaten, and all wrapped-up by the Jungle before he was six or seven years old. A victim of the environment. There was a laugh! Dooley the Sky-Pilot and Field the Head-Shrinker each trying to tell George Creese, who'd battered a city into line with his brain and fists, that he wasn't re-

sponsible for himself. Crap. Whatever he'd been and whatever he was, big-shot or bum, good or bad, he'd made himself. Nobody had made him or beat him. He was free. That was the real truth he had to hold onto.

"Will you help Ray?" Wendy was asking. "Possibly save his life? For my sake, George?"

Creese was quiet for a few moments following this question, then he asked, "What did Ray think of the idea of sending for me?"

Wendy stood up. "No, no—stay there," she said as Creese began to rise. "It's all right." She walked to one of the curtained windows and stared at the soft lighted, hazy images they transmitted. "When I discussed it with Ray, he had objections; however, I overcame them. He finally agreed that I was right." Wendy paused and turned round to face Creese, adding, "If you'll organize and head up a powerful resistance group—"

"A mob," Creese interrupted.

"Yes, certainly, we'll deal in facts. A mob. Well, Ray will put one-hundred-thousand dollars behind you—to start. And the five major industrialists will add substantially to that. Will you do it?"

Would he do it? He looked again at the Utrillo painting with its white cobbled streets, lime-colored walls, rough cast and quaint; its bustle-clad women and high-hatted, frock-coated gentlemen; its pink forms and violet shadows—Paris—refined, gentle, aesthetic—a world that didn't exist anymore. Maybe it never really had. Like the world of Wendy and Ray. A fragile world that was mostly gone. It's substantiality and permanence was all in their minds. Music, polite conversation, gracious dining by candlelight—all the nice, tasteful things—but what did it mean when the chips were down? When the truth came out? When you got round to calling a spade a spade, or—as Wendy herself had put it—when you got round to dealing in facts—to what or whom was the ultimate appeal?

To what and to whom did these nice Rays and Wendys owe their existence? Their beautiful, gracious world?

To the club, of course. And to the man behind it who could act without much thinking. To the hard-fisted, knuckle headed guy from the Jungle who could smash in a face when necessary and laugh. The man with the rod, the chopper, the sap who could take a stand, right or wrong, and keep the proper people on the proper side of the tracks. Sure, the Wendys and the Rays could dream up a world worth living in, give it class, work out rules, but it took guys like Creese to hold it together. When wrong Joes get out of line, you don't reason or cajole or bribe; you smash and kick, stab and shoot. If you kill 'em, so much the better; there being plenty more trash

where that trash came from and lots of room in the river and earth for stiffs.

"Will you do it?" Wendy repeated her question. A new look had come upon her face; surprise mixed with concern. She evidently had not reckoned with Creese's delay in replying.

"You and Ray, and the people of your world," Creese said quietly, "have bred and educated and reformed yourselves right out of existence. You wanted everything nice and you got it that way, but then you wanted it perfect and you turned on the guys who were policing the whole shebang for you. I don't mean you personally, of course; I mean the big reform movement that put guys like me out of business. And—"

Wendy put out a hand imploringly. "Wait, George—"

"No." Creese shook his head and stood up. "Listen to what I've got to say. It's hard for me to put ideas across and if you argue I'll miss the point. I won't and can't help you, but it's important you understand why. I don't know why it's important—I'd have to think a long time about that—but it is. So listen and then you can talk. Nobody can help you. What's going on in this town's going on all over. You and Ray and your people, the West Side, hate crime and violence, but you'll live with it and tolerate it as long as it's your system, working for you. Right now, here in this town, it's working for the poor slobs over in Steelville and the Jungle. Now that you people are out, you've discovered where you went wrong; and it's not crime and graft and corruption you object to at all, it's because it's *their* set-up and it's keeping you West Siders in line. Anyway, that's how I see it. Now wait—" Creese held up a hand—"There's more. You can't go back; nobody can. I'm out of date and I think the world you want's out of date too. To you and Ray and your class of people I'm just a tough-guy with a club—or I was—and you need me the same way you need cops, executioners, pig-butchers, and a whole lot of other people with dirty, unpleasant jobs you'd like to pretend didn't exist. But a lot of wrong ghees, the slobs, the crooked politicians—you have to have politicians—they've wised up on you. If they have to spend their lives in the mud, at least they'll do it for themselves—their own profit. They've wised up, Wendy—do you think I can change that? No, it's all over for both of us."

When Creese stopped, Wendy stood watching him in silence. Her features were pale, but she remained perfectly calm, on the surface at least, and in no manner betrayed how deeply Creese's words might have struck. She said, "But the city's being destroyed. Literally destroyed. Every value's being overthrown—property, human dignity, freedom, culture—this system

they control—" at the word *they* Wendy shuddered and frowned—"is a world of beasts. Worse even."

"It always was," Creese smiled. "Only in the old days it obligingly wore a mask and spared you the sight of its ugliness, while all the time it worked for you. Now it's rebeled, stripped off the mask, and works for itself. That's the long and short of it."

A note of bitterness entered Wendy's voice. "You've developed into something of a philosopher yourself, George." The bitterness became pointed as she continued, "And I'll admit you do well at it." She hesitated, clenched her hands into fists at her sides, and added, "Given another background and an earlier beginning, you might well have been an American Oswald Spengler and presented us with a domestic version of *Das Untergang Des Abenlandes.* Your ideas of a decaying aristocracy and a crime-ridden welfare-state are suggestive of his."

Creese barely heard these ironic remarks. Aside from the fact that the man's name and the German words had no meaning to Creese, he was suddenly preoccupied with an inner sensation. It was as if someone had clicked a switch, completing or closing an open circuit, and thereby permitted a discharge of currents that had been stored for a long, long time. The thing began somewhere at the top of Creese's head and moved wavelike down the length of his body, gathering intensity and power as it progressed. The effect was cathartic. As it swept down it gathered all tensions and conflicts in its wake and removed them so completely from Creese's being that it was as if they'd never existed. He trembled from the shock and then relaxed.

And when his mind returned to Wendy, he studied her as she stood by the window facing him. The experience he'd just had evidently did not show outwardly, for there was no change in her attitude—no realization that an important thing had happened to him. Wendy was as before—pale, tense, fists clenched at her sides—ready to defend her world with every weapon in existence, including sarcasm, irony, and remarks that would clearly show that Creese was an uneducated, unread man. A hoodlum, an ex-con, and a bum.

Creese laughed, lightly and easily. He didn't care. He was indifferent. Wendy had come out from behind the wall of detachment, or it had crumbled. She was naked before him, every petty flaw and weakness exposed. Without the wall the self-possessed, assured woman had been revealed as a frightened, confused child who, in order to get her way, would sacrifice anything or anybody—and do it in a spirit of desperate anxiety without logic, reason, or method. And Creese was indifferent. It was all hopeless and meaningless. Al-

most as if he couldn't believe his feelings, Creese dug into his own heart, testing and trying to find an emotion beneath the indifference. All he found was a mild, good-humored sort of pity.

Within the next second, Wendy herself realized what had happened. She actually made a slight backward movement and unconsciously brought forward her arms as if to cover a nakedness that was physical. Then she caught herself and got control again. She raised her chin, displaying the long classic lines of her throat, and stood stiffly erect.

"Well," she said archly, "you know."

"Yes."

Wendy gave a queeer little laugh. "And that's all you've got to say?"

"Yes."

"You're going back to Chicago?"

"Yes."

"To the do-nothing life you described?"

"Yes." There was a strength and vitality in Creese now that he hadn't felt for years. It was in the very tone of the word "yes". He smiled at Wendy and repeated, "Yes, I am. I'm going to think some more. There was a guy in stir with me, my cellmate for a while, a fellow named Hickey Dooley—a real queer duck. Always reading the Bible and a lot of other thick books—as a matter of fact, I think they were philosophy books. Now, Hickey was a lifer and no fink. Back during prohibition when he was a kid he belonged to Packy Malone's mob in Baltimore and ran a chopper—a machinegun. When the feds broke Packy, Hickey Dooley expected the chair—there were capital charges against him in three states—and when he didn't get it, the electric-chair, it was such a surprise he began spending all his time trying to find out why. He read everything in the prison-library and a lot of other books from outside, and he ended up believing in God. He believed God had saved him. The Man Upstairs. And the funny part is, when you stop to think about it, God was just about the only one who could have saved him, his case was so bad. Of course, it's easy to say he went stirnuts, but personally I think if Hickey'd happened to pick up a Bible before he picked up that tommy-gun when he was a kid, he'd have become a minister in the first place."

When Creese paused a moment, Wendy said coldly, "This is charming and quaint. I have the greatest respect for Mr. Dooley. But does it all come to any point?"

"Not much, I guess. Except Dooley once told me nobody can belong to himself—not without going nuts anyway, and if he does that, he still don't belong to himself. And since you can't belong to yourself, according to Dooley, you either belong to things, people, or God. And when you try to spread yourself, over the three, you're miserable."

"Mr. Dooley's ideas aren't exactly original," Wendy said.

Creese smiled. "No, I guess not. But considering his background and his late start, plus the fact he was in the pen and not some swank college, I think he did pretty good. An old guard who knew Hickey from the beginning told me he had trouble just reading when he started; that he had to spell words out letter by letter. Today Hickey can read Latin. I think that's pretty good."

"All right," Wendy snapped impatiently, "it's quite good. Commendable. And now—" she glanced at a small crystal based clock that rested on a side table—"it is becoming late, George."

"Yes. Well, there's not much more. Dooley had it worked out how people begin by wanting things and put themselves and their hopes into them, but no matter what or how much they get they're disappointed and unhappy. No thing ever turns out what it's supposed to be. Then some of them grow up and turn away from things; they give themselves to people—certain people, of course—and at first this satisfies. It's an improvement. But again they're disappointed as time passes. And finally, if they live long enough and wise-up, they give themselves entirely to God. According to Dooley, this gives them complete satisfaction. And ever after that they treat things and people—people's weaknesses and failings that is—as a sort of childish illusion. And that's about it, Wendy. I can't put the idea across the way Hickeey Dooley can, but I thought I'd tell you. I don't know why. Just an urge."

Wendy moved with dignity to her service-bell. She tinkled it once, summoning Greta. "I think you're close on the heels of Mr. Dooley in his philosophy," she said. "I'll say goodbye now and wish you good-luck, George. Greta will bring your things and see you out." With these words, Wendy walked toward the door from which she'd entered the room; however, at the threshold she hesitated and turned. "I don't suppose it'll make a particle of difference, but—" she came back and stood in front of Creese, close to him, "Things between Ray and me have never been as they were with us. I guess I don't really expect you to believe that. However—" Wendy left the thought unfinished as the maid entered.

"Ma'm?"

"Mr. Creese's coat, please."

A hard silence formed while Greta went for the coat. At last Creese said, "I think I understand. I guess it's true as far as anything's true. There's still no way I can help you, Wendy."

Wendy concealed whatever effect these words had. She inclined her head once, turned, and left the room without saying anything further.

A minute later, wearing his hat and coat, Creese took one long final look at the smaller painting, noting once again its bright oranges, green fruit, and infinitely deep background. Then he stepped out into the hallway.

The plainclothes copper was standing by the big window. With him were two sulky-looking, teen-aged youths—typical overdressed young toughs with almost standard, callow, thin-featured faces. While they smoked cigarettes, they spoke to the copper in tight-lipped undertones, and stared hard at Creese as he walked from Wendy's apartment door to the line of elevators. For his part, Creese gave them little more than a glance while he signaled for a car.

He wasn't surprised, however, when the pair exchanged some kind of final words with the copper and moved quickly toward the elevators. The copper grinned, put a freshly lit cigar in his jaw, and watched them move away. Then he turned his back and looked idly out of the window.

As they approached, the boys separated, obviously intending to come up on each side of Creese. Creese turned and let his eyes flick rapidly across the boy-men.

Punks, he thought, stooging for the thickheaded bull. He rested his eyes on the larger of the pair. A real hood would have been warned by Creese's quiet look, but this was a punk.

"We'll go with you, Old-Timer," the kid said. He was a shade taller than Creese, looked lean and boney, and had an insolent, swaggering stance. His mouth was small, a thick pink bud, and he smiled with an unpleasant sucking motion, showing three large spotty-looking teeth.

"Where, Sonny?" Creese asked, letting the final word drawl.

The kid's companion took his place on Creese's other side. He was shorter, a little heavier, and seemed content to smoke while his buddy carried the conversation. He kept one hand, the right, in his overcoat pocket.

"To the train-station, Pop." The kid held out a hand and poked a small square of cardboard at Creese. "Your ticket. Back to Chi. Compliments of the town to a real old-time red-hot. And—" the kid enlarged his nasty, sucking grin—"Just to make sure you don't fall on your face on the way, we're takin' you there. Now ain't that nice of us?"

The elevator doors slid noiselessly open. Creese stepped forward, entering with the boys at his side. As yet he'd not moved to take the ticket, although it seemed to be a heaven-sent solution to a problem he'd been about to face—how to raise the train-fare back to Chicago. When the doors closed, the kid poked the ticket forward again, saying, "Hold on tight to it, Pop; it's your life-preserver."

Creese looked lazily at the boy and said, "Stick it up your ass, punk."

Not expecting this kind of answer, it put the kid off guard for a fraction of a second. In that interval of time, Creese stepped back quickly and left an empty space between the young thugs. He kicked viciously at the taller one's right leg, catching him squarely behind the knee, and causing him to drop low on the right side. And practically with the same motion he brought a hard fist down on the kid's neck, hitting solidly behind the ear and smashing him to the floor. He slumped into unconsciousness without as much as a groan.

The whole action took about one second, which was the time the shorter, heavier kid needed to appraise the situation, get his gun out of his pockets, and point it.

The gun roared deafeningly in the confined space of the elevator. A bullet tore past Creese and hit the wall. Creese lunged for the gun, knocking it sideways and downward with his left hand the instant the kid pulled the trigger again. The second slug tore into Creese's left thigh, slammed hard against the bone, and nearly spun him round. He grabbed the kid's gun wrist in his right hand and lurched heavily into his body. Creese barely felt a clumsy left-hand punch from the kid while he forced the gun-barrel downward. The kid yanked the trigger again without knowing where the gun pointed—and sent a bullet crashing down into the arch of his own right foot. He screamed in pain. Creese grinned. He made a mighty effort and drove the kid's gun hand into the elevator wall, cracking a couple knuckles. Then he started twisting fingers the way they didn't go. The kid screamed again and the gun fell to the floor. Creese got it and lurched away.

The kid, foot smashed and hand broken, cowered into the far corner of the elevator, and, staring at Creese with wild frightened eyes, whimpered, "Jesus, Mister, gimme a break! I'm only seventeen!"

Creese laughed. He couldn't see the kid's face clearly because his glasses had been knocked off in the action. All he saw was the cringing body topped by a pasty white blob of flesh. "Sure, Sonny," Creese muttered, laughing again. He stepped forward and lashed at the white blob with the gun barrel. He kept it up until the white thing became a hunk of red paste that slumped to the floor. "Happy eighteenth birthday," he said, grinning and turning. The first kid was getting to his knees, groggily shaking his head and rubbing the back of his neck. Creese kicked him in the face and put him back to sleep.

The elevator had stopped during the fight; the doors were open, giving a clear view of the lobby. It was empty of people.

Holding his thigh with his left hand, gun gripped in his right,

Creese hobbled from the car, blood-spattered, hatless, and half blind. The idea of finding his hat and glasses never occurred to him, nor did any clear plan of escape occupy his mind. He and the gun were going forward; it was all he knew or cared. He expected opposition from somewhere, but God help whoever got in his way now.

A woman with a poodle on a leash entered the main doors of the foyer, took one look at Creese, and dove back out so fast she almost strangled the dog.

Then the doors of the last elevator on the side opposite to Creese opened and the plainclothes copper rushed out holding his gun. He'd heard the shots, but apparently expected a different picture, for the cigar dropped from his mouth when he saw Creese and the crumpled bodies in the open elevator behind him. He pulled up short, stopping ten feet in front of Creese, holding his gun level.

Creese squinted and grinned. His own gun was dead centered on the copper's thick belly.

Neither man could very well miss at the short distance.

"Wait!" the copper cried, his face draining white. "Let's—"

Creese fired. The slug tore straight into the copper's fat gut. "For what?" Creese asked. He shot again.

The copper's big ugly jaw folded up tight in pain. He shot back, convulsively,—once, twice, three times —all the bullets ripped into Creese.

Mortally wounded, both men stood staring at each other. Then the copper's eyes rolled back and he fell. Creese tried to laugh and choked on a big bubble of blood that gushed up in his throat. He vomited it out and staggered forward, dropping the gun from a hand that no longer possessed sensation or feeling. Halfway to the main doors of the building he fell, face downward, and had the curious experience of being painless and bodiless. He thought, move arm, move hand, but nothing happened; no answer came from those parts to indicate they even existed. Nor could he feel himself breathing. The tile floor, two inches from his eyes, became a gray mist infinite in depth. And suddenly in that grayness he saw very clearly the painting with the oranges and mangoes and the midnight blue background behind them. He saw Wendy too, standing off to one side, between himself and the painting. He thought a smile and began moving toward the spark-littered blackness, or blueness, behind the fruit, passing right by Wendy who never even saw him. At the edge of the darkness he thought, "Hickey, why all the fuss? It's so easy." Then he pushed on into the midnight blue nothing, and far beyond.

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tough boy

BY RICHARD WELLES

"I don't know," he thought. "I just don't know what this younger generation is coming to."

Ben glanced at the dashboard clock, and noted with satisfaction that he was running well ahead of schedule. Not that it could matter less. He was not a man to rush. Scrambling around like a chicken with its head cut off brought on tension, foul-ups, and ulcers. He could do without that type of action. Long ago he had learned that if you took it slow and easy, you invariably lasted longer and finished up stronger. When he had to he could shake himself, but speed for its own sake had no value.

Suddenly he realized that he was hungry. That was hardly surprising. He had been on the road for close to four hours. The drive-in came up on the outskirts of town, and he wheeled the Chrysler onto the paved surface.

A young waitress, pert and pretty in black slacks and white blouse walked over to the car. He ordered a Big-Daddy-Burger and a large Root Beer. A few minutes later the waitress returned, clipping the tray expertly to the rolled-down window.

The food was beyond his expectations. He thought about another burger, decided against it, and settled for a cigarette instead. He dragged at it idly between refreshing sips of the cold Root Beer. The cigarette was down to a butt when the kids roared in, making that special brand of racket peculiar to teen-agers. There was sufficient room on the lot to park a battleship, but they pulled to a screeching halt directly opposite the gleaming Chrysler.

Ben finished the Root Beer, and glanced in their direction. There were four of them, two boys and two girls, paired off front and back. They were in uniform-tight jeans and tight sweaters on the girls, tight jeans and T-Shirts on the boys. Their vehicle was an ancient Ford, chopped-down and customized almost beyond recognition. The waitress came and took their order. As she went back to the stand she removed the tray and tip from the Chrysler.

Ben lit another cigarette, and reached for the ignition key. It was then that he heard it. The language the kids were using wasn't rough—to say it was filthy would have been charitable. Ben turned in the seat to glare at them. He was met by four pair of hostile eyes. The leader, the hub of the little wheel, was obviously the driver. He was a big kid, almost a man, as heavy and well-muscled as Ben himself.

"Something bugging you?" he asked.

"Yes," Ben replied, "Your language is bugging me. You should learn how to speak English."

"How about Pig-Latin, mister? Like uckfay ouyay!"

Ben reached for the door handle, caught himself. *Don't be an ass, he decided, It would upset you and it wouldn't do them any good. All they want is attention and they don't care how they get it. You slap their ears back and they'll take it out on the next person.*

He rolled up the window, and pulled the car out on the highway. Behind him the kids hooted derisively, and honked the horn at his departure.

About three miles out of town he realized that the incident wasn't over. The rear-view showed him a low-slung silhouette that he recognized as being from the drive-in. A soft curse passed his lips, and his foot tramped down on the accelerator. They upped the pursuit, their vehicle eating up the miles like an animal with insatiable appetite. They had a custom mill under the hood, and the Chrysler, good as it was, couldn't lose them.

The gap closed quickly, and within minutes they were breathing down his neck. Seconds later they were alongside him, shouting hysterically, and trying to suck him into a dangerous game.

Ben wasn't buying any. Not for one moment did he dispute the kid's superiority behind a wheel. Nor was he about to let his anger take control. He hit the power brakes, and the big car skidded to a halt. He got out from behind the wheel, and stood on the highway. The hot-rod had stopped twenty feet beyond him, and the kids piled out and walked back toward him. The big kid stayed a few paces ahead of his retinue.

"Okay," Ben said, "Fun is fun. Let's get back into our cars, and hope we don't see each other again."

"New York plates," the kid said, "It figures. Big city. Big man. Big mouth."

Ben grinned.

"That's me alright. A big mouth and a big foot to put in it. Well, maybe I'll learn as I get older."

"I wouldn't count on getting much older if I was you."

You little bastard, Ben thought.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," the kid said, "But back there a bit you didn't seem to like our method of speaking. Isn't that so? I do believe your big mouth objected to it."

"A misunderstanding, I guess," Ben said.

"You damn well believe it, mister-big-mouth. Try this for language."

The kid began to curse a vile stream of obscenity. Ben was acutely aware of what was happening. The little punk had the idea that Ben had insulted him. The unpardonable sin had been committed in front of his friends, and it was something that couldn't be passed over. But the kid wasn't all that sure of himself. He was cursing himself into a rage, substituting blind anger for the courage he didn't really possess. As he worked himself up to a pitch, the filth spewed from his mouth in a torrent of hate. Ben heard the click, and stepped back as the knife appeared in the kid's hand.

"I'm going to cut you, big-mouth-man. I'm going to rip your belly open and drop your guts on the highway."

It was past the talking stage. The kid wouldn't be reasoned with. In his sick little mind, he saw himself on a field of honour. This man, this adult was his enemy. And the enemy had to be defeated, whatever the cost.

Ben made another attempt.

"Put the knife away, punk. Do it now."

The kid didn't notice the change. He was too wrapped up in his sense of power. The other kids were under the spell too, shouting encouragement to their leader.

Ben kept his eyes on the knife. It was held underhand, and the hand looked expert. He had to make it to the car, get behind the wheel and get the hell out of there. He telegraphed his move. The kid saw it and charged fast, the knife swinging upward in a murderous arc.

With the blade only inches away, Ben brought out the gun, and blew the kid's face off. Before he hit the ground, Ben was in the car and behind the wheel. The three others were nothing to worry about. Two of them had turned to stone, and the other, a cute little blonde of sixteen or so, was screaming as though it was the end of the world.

Seconds later, the Chrysler had left them far behind. Wheels clicked furiously in Ben's head. As the car devoured the miles he was making plans. There was no sweat with the kids. They were in a state of shock, and by the time the state cops got

there, he would be long gone.

But there were other things to consider. When he reached his destination he would have to get a face-lifting job done on the Chrysler. A new set of plates too—that could be arranged. Then there was the gun. It couldn't be used on the *hit* now. He would have to dispose of it, and arrange to get another one. Then just for insurance he would have to work out a different route home.

What a goddamn nuisance. And all because of that stupid little punk.

I don't know, he thought, *I just don't know what this younger generation is coming to.*

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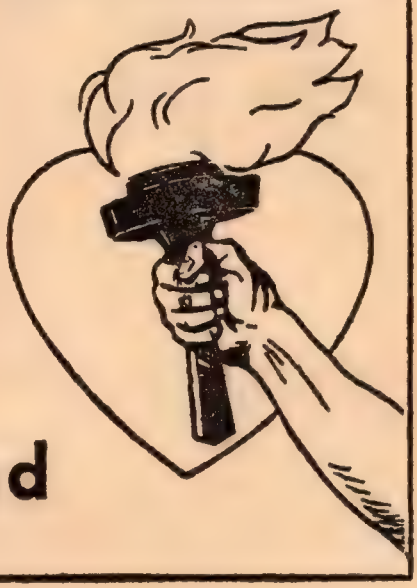

Jim Trifano had been on the inside . . . looking out. Now he was free. He found himself on the outside . . . looking in.

NO FUTURE

BY
DONALD LEE

Jim Trifano clutched his beer bottle. The chill felt good in his hand like the sting of a paper cut sometimes feels good with the clean, sharp pain. He stared intently at the array of liquor bottles behind the bar, but he did not see them. He was brooding about the difficulties experienced since his release from prison. A hand clamped abruptly on his left shoulder and spun him around.

"Fat boy! It's good to see you."

Fats playfully punched at Jim's arm. "Grab your beer and let's get a booth, we've got talking to do. Hey, waitress, bring me a Duke. What are you drinking, Jim?"

"Nothing. I have more than half a bottle here."

They sat down in one of the empty booths. "You just want one Duke?" asked the waitress who had walked over to the booth and was emptying the contents of the ashtray into a paper napkin.

Fats eyed the waitress. "Yeah, honey, just one. You're looking good, Jim," Fats said when the waitress had left. "Seems funny to see you in street clothes."

"Cigarette?" Jim offered, throwing the pack on the table.

Fats toyed with the pack. "Remember when we'd be broke at the end of the month and have to smoke state issue? . . . like smoking oil-soaked rope. Ugh. And when a guy had tailor-mades he'd hide the pack in his socks or a bulge of his shirt where they couldn't be spotted and then sneak into a corner to smoke."

"Yeah," Jim laughed. "I remember when you'd rolled a pack of homemades and carried them in your shirt pocket and when a guy asked you for a cigarette, you'd give him a coffin nail and keep the tailor-mades for yourself. You thought you were being foxy."

Fats laughed merrily. "I've been out five weeks now and haven't drawn a sober breath yet." The waitress set his beer in front of him and Fats tossed a crumpled dollar bill on her tray. "Place is kind of quiet tonight, isn't it?" he asked as she counted out his change. She nodded and said something about Tuesday nights always being slow.

"What are you doing, Fats? Working anyplace?"

"No, not now. Man, the first week I was out I pounded the streets until my feet were raw. Those state brogans rubbed the skin off the top of my big toe. Finally my stepfather—old Helpful Henry—dug me up a job working with a guy building houses . . . a lousy fifty bucks a week . . . talk about slave labor—Siberia'd be a lark compared to that. The first day I dug ditches steady for nine hours."

Fats shook his head at the remembered injustice. "The next day I was so goddam sore I felt like somebody had worked me over with a sap. You know, you're not used to doing a good day's work when you come out of the pen. Well, about three o'clock in the afternoon, I'm so sore I can't move without a pain. Man I'm throbbing like an aching tooth, so I take ten. I'm leaning up against the front of the house when this little Dago spots me and he crawls all over me. He starts yelling and I almost flattened the bastard. I told him to give me my money and jam his job." Fats laughed and added, "It broke me up so I haven't bothered looking for a job since."

"Jobs are damn hard to find." Jim sighed and ground his cigarette butt in the ashtray. "I feel like I'm freeloading on my kid sister and her husband. He goes to work all day, she's knocking herself out washing clothes or cleaning and I'm sitting around reading a magazine. Christ, there's not that much I can help her with but I feel guilty just sitting around doing nothing. Hell, there's no place to go. I've been everyplace looking for work."

"Know what you mean," Fats said with a shake of his head. "I tell my wife I can't stand to see her working so hard and that's why I spend so much time in bars."

"You know, I couldn't even get a job on the labor gang at the mill," Jim said.

"Know what you mean," Fats repeated. "They say they'll give you a call if anything turns up but nothing ever will. Same old jazz everywhere." He shrugged. "Let's get another beer." He turned and caught the waitress's attention, waved two fingers and flashed a broad grin.

Jim relaxed with a pleasant glow. It was the first time since he had come home that he could talk easily and freely. "You know, Fats," Jim mused, giving voice to his thoughts, "I feel kind of funny even with my own family. If I stay home there's nothing to talk about, if I ask for the car they get worried. Somebody calls me on the phone and they think he's a hoodlum. And every once in a while I catch them staring at me. They treat me OK but I feel . . . well, like an outsider."

Jim took a deep drink of beer and tongued the flecks of foam from his lips. "Out on the street it's even worse," he continued. "I feel like everybody's looking at me and talking about me, like they know I'm just out of stir. I was in a bar the other night and the bartender looks my way a couple of times and I felt guilty as hell—as though he had caught me casing the joint."

Fats chuckled. "Everybody feels that way the first time he gets out. Hell, when I got out of the reformatory, I'd get on a streetcar and I'd think everybody was staring at me. I'd go clear to the back and take the last seat. Took me six weeks to get over it."

The waitress brought their beers and counted the price from the change lying on the table. Fats glanced up and winked but there was no flicker of response from the waitress as she put the empties on the tray and left.

"They're squares, Jimbo," Fats said emphatically as though this somehow explained everything. "All these squares know how to do is to pack a lunch bucket and hit the nine to five shift. They don't go nowhere, they don't do nothing, they don't understand nothing. They don't even live—just work and die."

"Right now I wish I could join them," Jim said wistfully.

Fats shrugged his shoulders and sat silent, picked up the cigarette pack and tapped one out. "Once you get a record, babe," he said quietly, "you're through." He lit up, dragged deeply on the cigarette and exhaled a cloud of blue smoke. "If you date a decent girl, as soon as her old lady finds out you got a record she yells cops. If you get a job and something turns up missing, you're a sitting duck. You're the first guy they suspect and they'll bounce you off the job even if you're

in the clear. Just walk down the street and a cop recognizes you, you're subject to be picked up for questioning. You haven't done nothing but when people see a cop dragging you along the street, they look at you like you're Dillinger."

There was no bitterness in his tone, no edge to his voice, more a note of resignation. Some drunk presses you in a bar and you've got to walk away from him in front of everybody, because if you get in a fight, it's your fault, you've got a record. If your kid gets in a fight, it's his fault, the kid's got bad blood." He sighed, took another deep puff of the cigarette and blew the smoke out through his nostrils. "They won't let you join them. What'a'ya gonna do?"

Jim screwed up his face and reached for the cigarettes and matches.

"Those creeps give me a pain," Fats continued, reverting to his banter. "My aunt expects me to sit around the house at night twiddling my thumbs. The kids are screaming and scalping each other. Her old man's glued to the TV set. She's washing or ironing or screwing around in the kitchen. The place is a madhouse. What are ya gonna do?" He shrugged his shoulders to punctuate the futility. "The hell with it."

Jim moodily picked at the label on his beer bottle. "I stopped in to see our minister," he said, balling up the pieces of torn label and dropping them into the ashtray. "I figured he might be able to help me get a job. I gave him all the gory details and told him how bad I need a job. 'Do you pray much?' he asks. I tell him once in a while and he says, 'Prayer. That's the answer, Jim, pray to the Almighty.' "

"I get back to the job and he tells me, 'You've got to show people that you've changed; you've got to show them you can be trusted.' So I says, 'Fine. How do I do that?' He thinks a couple of minutes and then says 'Let God help you'—so I'm stopping him?—'Pray to the Lord for a job and I'll remember you in my prayers too.'

"So I said, 'It might help more if you could remember me to some of the businessmen in the congregation.' I told him religion's fine but not on an empty stomach."

"Hey, you're bitter, Jim," Fats said. "Don't let 'em get to you, buddy. Come on. We're going to celebrate."

Jim stifled a yawn. "Say what ever happened to One-eyed Pete?"

"Cruzaro? He got paroled to Ohio. You were still there when he left. His wife's people set him up in a radio repair shop."

"That's what I'd like to do—go into business for myself, then I wouldn't have to explain anything to any of these bastards."

"Hey, hey!" Fats exclaimed. "Get a load of those two chicks that just came in. That blond is sharp."

Their eyes followed as the two

girls walked almost the length of the bar and sat down near the far end. The blond glanced in their direction and Fats intercepted and returned her glance.

"Wait a minute, Jimbo. Be right back."

Before Jim could say anything Fats got up and strolled with a half swagger to where the girls were sitting, and leaned on the bar next to them like a big time operator. The blond had glanced up at his approach and soon all three were talking.

Jim wrinkled his nose. What the hell's the point of it? he thought. I've got enough for a couple of beers and Fats probably isn't holding much more . . . they order a mixed drink and we're tapped out. Three years I dream about women, he reflected bitterly, and now I'm finally out—plenty of stuff around and I can't afford to talk to them.

It would be nice to have a girl, Jim mused, someone to talk to, someone who cared about him and wanted him. He thought of how nice it would be to have his dream girl beside him now. He'd slip his arm around her, press her close and the softness and pressure of her body against his would satisfy and reassure him.

"That blond is really sharp," Fats said, setting a fresh bottle of beer in front of Jim and sliding into the seat opposite. "I'd like to hole up with her a couple of days."

"Are they buying?" Jim asked. "That's the only way I could take them out."

Fats laughed, a deep, merry laugh that always sounded like he was having a great time. "That's the best kind to get. A doll with . . ." He broke off and flashed a big smile at the blond who, while turning to speak to her companion, was again looking in their direction. "Those bitches are looking for a man tonight. What do you say we pick them up? So we blow five bucks."

"Five bucks," Jim repeated. "Before I got busted I used to blow five times that much, now I can't even beg five bucks."

Fats bit his lower lip and studied Jim for a few minutes. "You know what'd be nice? If you could pull one good job, *one good job"*, he emphasized, where there was no chance of getting caught and you could score for a couple of thousand; enough money to do some good, get some clothes, maybe go into business."

Fats took out a cigarette and tamped it thoughtfully against his thumb nail. "Guys like us ain't gonna get no breaks. We ain't even gonna get a fair shake unless we got money. If you got money, Jim, don't matter what your record is, people call you mister and give you respect."

Jim traced designs with his fingertip on the frosty sweat of the beer bottle. "Fats, I don't ever want to go back to the pen. I used to go

nuts in that cell. I used to wonder—what if there's a fire or an explosion. I'm locked in and there's no way I can get out. The guards aren't going to worry about me. They're going to save their own skin. I'd burn to death or maybe be buried alive. I don't want to die in a cage like some trapped animal."

Fats took a swig of beer. "Yeah, well the thing is not to get caught."

"Oh, I never thought of that," Jim said sarcastically.

"Look, if you pick your job carefully, case it, check it out, go over all the details until you have them down perfectly, then when you pull it, there's no slip up. It goes off like clockwork." Fats reflected a few minutes before continuing. "One thing I learned—if you're gonna go for something, go for something big. If you make it, you've got money. If you don't, you don't get no more time."

"No money's worth going to the pen, Fats. I think I'd rather hold court on the street. Just shoot it out there."

"You think this is any better?" Fats demanded. "You can't get a job. You're mooching off relatives and everytime they want something done, you've got to hop to it because they're keeping you. They dole out a buck at a time, you never have enough to get a glow on and you can't make a play because you can't buy a couple of lousy drinks. Man, you might as well be dead . . . or back at the pen. At least there you don't have to apologize to anyone for eating—in fact, with the garbage they serve they owe you an apology for feeding it to you."

Jim glanced at the clock then got up to phone his sister. On his return he saw that the two girls had joined them in the booth.

"This is my buddy, Jim," Fats said. "He's going to college. This is Mary Ann and . . . Sue, right?"

"Susie," the dark-haired girl confirmed, sliding against the wall to make room for Jim. As he sat down she gave him a friendly smile and said, "Things are kind of dead tonight, aren't they?"

"Yeah," Jim nodded amicably. "Not much action tonight." Or any other night, he thought, without some money. Sue wasn't as striking as the blond, but friendlier.

"Say, where are we at, the Sahara?" the blond complained to Fats. "Let's have a drink. Are you going to buy or are you going to shove off so we can pick up a live one?"

Fats burst out laughing. "You're something else, baby. I'll buy you the world and give it to you on a silver platter."

"Yeah?" the blond retorted. "Well for now just make it a Budweiser on a beer tray."

Fats grinned. "I'm on my way."

"The guys in this town make me sick," Mary Ann declared. "They buy you a two bit hamburger then spend the rest of the night trying to squeeze it out of you."

"Say, honey," Fats said, returning to the booth and leaning over Mary Ann. "We're taking you home, right, Jim?"

"What do we look like," Mary Ann exclaimed, "a two bit pick up? Where are the drinks?"

"Coming right up," Fats said, hustling back towards the bar.

"Your friend's in for a disappointment," Mary Ann said to Jim. "We drove down here and we're driving back."

She turned towards Jim and smiled. "We usually go out to Danceland on Saturdays. They get a nice crowd."

"I haven't been to Danceland for a couple of years," Jim said.

"They remodeled it completely last year." She had a soft, musical voice that made him want to put his arms around her and hold her. "Why don't you and your buddy come out Saturday?"

Jim enjoyed the faint fragrance of perfume and pressed lightly against Sue. "Are you going to be there this Saturday?"

"I think so. Yes, we'll be there."

Her voice and her perfume seemed to mingle together and Jim felt a desire to close his eyes and nestle close. Maybe I can scrounge some money by Saturday, he thought, meet her at the dance and take her out afterwards.

Fats returned and was joshing with Mary Ann. "Blondie, you're a riot."

"Yeah, I really fracture them. One day this guy Ronnie takes me to the races," she said, tapping Jim's sleeve for attention. "He had been pestering me for a date so I finally break down and say OK. When we get back to town he wants to go up to his apartment. I want to go to a club. 'I spent thirty dollars on you today,' he tells me. 'So what do you want me to do,' I said, 'take up a collection?' "

Jim grinned, enjoying Mary Ann's sense of humor, but enjoying still more holding hands below the table with Sue, knuckles intertwined, squeezing her hand occasionally and receiving a squeeze in return.

After the girls had left, Fats and Jim sat discussing them.

"I'm going to take her out," Jim declared and finished lamely, "as soon as I get a little money." He studied his beer, frowned, and began scraping the label with his fingernail. "You said something about making a score, Fats. Have anything in mind?"

Fats' face creased into a smile. "You really interested in doing something, Jim?"

Jim nodded. "Yeah, this is for the birds."

"This is the perfect set-up," Fats said, licking his lips and plunging into the scheme with gusto. "This guy's a pick-up man for the numbers, see? He carries five or six thousand bucks in a little satchel. You tail him up Ninth Street just past Dunlop's and tell him to hand

over the bag. Keep your gun in your pocket. Then cut back through the alley and onto the avenue. I'll be waiting for you in a car. It's that simple."

"How much did you say he carries?"

"At last five or six thousand. I can't take him myself because the guy knows me. The nicest part of the whole set-up, Jimbo, is that nobody yells cops. They can't—the money's from the numbers."

"Sounds good, Fats. Hold the fort."

A sickening odor of rose disinfectant assailed Jim's nostrils as he entered the men's room. He thought about his stay in the pen, how he had hounded his sister to see the judge, and how he had pleaded with the parole board for a chance. He had hated being cooped behind bars, caged like rabbits in a warren. But more than that he had hated having somebody else do his thinking, make his decisions, tell him when to eat, when to shave, how to dress, who to associate with, even what to think. He had sworn then never to go back.

But this wasn't life as he had imagined it. He had planned to get a job, buy a car and get married. He had dreamed of a house surrounded by a big lawn and he'd work around the house, talk with the neighbors and people would say hello when they passed. How different it really was. Nobody would hire him because of his record, not even for laboring jobs.

What a hell of a parole rule, he thought bitterly, that requires you to disclose your record to prospective employers. They might as well tattoo my number across my forehead. People were embarrassed to have an ex-convict around, he reflected. They didn't trust him or thought him contaminated or something. Whatever it was, the sooner they were rid of him the better they felt.

Jim returned to the barroom and slid into the booth opposite Fats. "Let's go over the details again," he said.

THE OTHER SIDE

A
Novelette

BY
DANIEL DE PAOLA

They were a good bunch, tight-knit and loyal. And to get over the wall they had *to stick together.*

Like a few other cells in North Hill prison, 319 had only three men instead of four. Larry Raphael was in for life, murder two, George Hobart for twelve to fifteen, manslaughter one, and Augie Contaldo for grand larceny, three to five. They were on the third tier of the horseshoe shaped building, in the middle block which was the farthest from the highway. The prison yard lay inside the horseshoe and woods bordered the back on all three sides. From their small window, they could see the back wall and the thick tangled forest which led to mountains.

Since he had come here almost a year ago from Holdale prison in the southern part of the state, Larry had been casing North Hill. It was a maximum security prison and it had taken him eleven months to pick out a good plan from the dozens he had formulated and then discarded. Now he felt he had one and when the lights went out, the three of them met on the floor beneath the window, in the shadows far from the door.

"Let's go at it step by step," said Larry, as they all smoked and huddled low. "Getting out of the cell is no good. You still got the guards out in the hall. And there's no way we could cut through these bars,"

he motioned to the window above. "Not with the guards going up and down all the time. That let's the cell out; the break has to be from another point. Now where else do we go? To our workshops. Okay, we'll take them. You and me," he looked at Augie, "are in the metal shop. Only one door in or out. And guards all around. Even if we slipped out, we'd still be inside with guards between us and the wall. Right?" Augie nodded.

"And from what I hear, the laundry is just as bad, ain't it?" he looked at Hobe.

"That's right," said Hobe. "You heard about the guy who hid in a laundry cart and got out in the halls? Well he was still stuck for a way out."

"That's my point," said Larry. "The metal shop and the laundry are just like this cell. No way out but past guards. So I think we're agreed all those places are out. Now, where else do we go?"

"The yard?" asked Augie.

"Let's look at that. There's four ways out of the yard. The door of the inner gate to the outer."

"And there's a guard there," said Hobe.

Larry nodded. "Just like there is on all three doors back into the building."

"Which we wouldn't want to use anyway," said Augie. "The door to the inner gate is the best bet there. Maybe get a bunch together and rush the guard there."

"And have every guard in the area on top of you in a minute?" asked Hobe, shaking his head. "No, I think the yard is out too."

Larry nodded, "So do I. And what does that leave us?"

"The mess hall?" asked Augie. "That's worse than all the other places. Every time we're brought in and out, there's a mess of guards around. We could never work anything there."

"True," said Larry. "The mess hall is out too."

"So what's left?" asked Hobe.

"The warden's office?" Augie grinned. "I don't think we can get in there unnoticed."

"I don't either," said Larry. "But there is one other place we go to sometimes, a place that's pretty well set off by itself and where there's fewer guards than in most places."

"Where's that?" asked Augie.

Larry looked at both of them and said, "The infirmary."

"The hospital?" asked Hobe.

"That's right," said Larry. "It's way over in front, on the ground floor and pretty well set off from the other offices around it. There's a supply room next to it and an equipment room too before you get to the guards' rooms."

"Yeah, but there's a guard outside the door," said Hobe.

"I know," said Larry. "You can't have everything."

"What have you got in mind?" asked Augie.

"You know Feldman, the con

who works in the infirmary?" Larry asked, and when they both nodded, he said, "He's in on it with us. He's got a hacksaw blade; and he thinks we can get through the bars on the infirmary toilet window."

"Where is that?" asked Hobe.

"Between the ward and the supply room."

"But what about the guard outside the door?" asked Augie.

"Feldman says he don't think the guard'll hear the noise through two doors."

"Can we be sure?"

"We'll have to try it and see."

"How about whoever's in the sick bay at the time?" asked Hobe. "They'll hear it for sure."

"We thought of that. They'll have to know about it and anybody who wants to come after us, can do it. It'll be up to them."

"I don't know," Hobe shook his head. "Too many guys in on it. How do we know they'll keep their mouth shut?"

"We'll all be locked in for the night. If any one of them tries to get to the guard, I think we can stop him."

"What about the doctor?" asked Augie.

"His room is down past the guards' room. He's not around at night unless an orderly sends for him."

There was a pause; footsteps sounded outside and they sat still as the guard went by. Then Hobe said, "You really think it'll work?"

"Feldman and I been talking about it each time we could get together, and we think it's worth a try."

"Can you cut through these bars in a night?" asked Augie.

"That shouldn't be too hard," said Hobe. "But what about if and when we get outside the building?" he turned to Larry. "What about the wall?"

"We can make up some ropes for that. The main thing is to get outside the building."

"What about the guards outside?" asked Augie.

"The ones in the corner towers turn on their lights every fifteen minutes. It's the ones who walk around inside the walls that we have to worry about. But they can be timed."

"You left one thing out," said Hobe. "How do all of us get into the infirmary?"

"We been thinking about that too," said Larry.

"What have you come up with?"

Before Larry could reply, Augie said, "You know you gotta have a temperature of 102 or more to get in the hospital. Or else you have to be half dead."

"Yeah, I know," said Larry. "Feldman said he can get some pills for us to take. They'll give us the temperature and some spots too. Really make it look good."

"What kind of spots?" asked Augie.

Larry grinned at him. "I don't know, but we'll look sick and feel it too, he tells me."

"Just so we ain't too sick," said Hobe, "for what's to be done."

"He said we'll feel a bit weak but otherwise all right."

Hobe and Augie nodded. Steps returned and when the guard was past again, Larry said, "Now, we can get down to cases. You want to try it?" he asked Hobe.

"Yeah, if you think it's worth a try, I'm with you."

"You're sure?" Larry peered at him in the dim light.

"I'm sure," Hobe nodded.

They both turned to Augie and Larry said to him, "How about you, kid? You think you should get mixed up in this?"

"Why not?"

"You go another year or two and you'll be up for a parole."

"Maybe," said Augie. "Or maybe I'll be here a lot longer."

"You want to come too, then?"

"Yeah, I'm in."

"You sure you don't want to think it over?" asked Hobe.

"I don't have to think it over."

"It's different with us," said Larry. "We have to go a long time before we can look for parole. But with you, it's bound to come pretty soon, if you keep your nose clean."

"What're you trying to do, talk me out of this?" Augie glared at them both.

"No, we just want you to think it over good," said Hobe.

"I did think it over, and I want out, now. Not a year from now. That makes sense don't it?"

"If that's the way you feel, then that's it," said Larry.

There was a lull and Hobe asked, "How long do we have to wait?"

"A week, maybe two."

"How come?" asked Augie.

"Well," said Larry. "Feldman has to get those pills, and that'll take a few days. Then he has to make sure he's on duty that night, in the infirmary. And also," he paused and looked at Augue, "there has to be time for you to write to your sister and ask her to send you a cake."

"A cake?" Augie stared at him.

"Yeah, I figured it would look better if we all got sick on account of something we ate. But it can't be anything in the mess hall or everybody else would get sick too. So I think a cake from home is our best bet. Only the three of us will eat that, and it'll account for our getting sick."

"That might work at that," said Hobe.

"Why not?" said Augie. "She's sent me cakes before. It ain't gonna look funny if she sends another." He grinned at Larry.

"That's what I thought," said Larry. He looked at them and said, "Okay, any more questions?"

"Do you think it'll work?" asked Augie.

"It might."

"Seems like a lot of things have to go just right for us. Getting into

sick bay, being able to cut through the bars without the guard hearing it, being sure none of the others in the hospital try to stool on us, and then there's getting over the wall." He shook his head.

"You think maybe you don't want to come after all?" asked Hobe.

"No, I'll come, but I think we'll need a lot of luck."

"Luck and looking ahead," said Larry, "Like another hacksaw blade, I'm working on that. And some oil for the cutting, and the rope for the wall . . ."

"How about that?" asked Hobe.

"I think I got that lined up too."

"And what about a hook? To catch on top of the wall?" asked Augie.

"Feldman said he's got a scythe, you know, one of those curved blades. That'll do for a hook."

"He's thought of a lot," said Hobe. "I feel like I'm horning in on his deal."

"I said that once and he said it was all right. He's got more of a chance to get things. And he's glad to have somebody to go with him."

"How long has he been here?" asked Augie.

"About two years."

"What's he in for?"

"Attempted murder, he tried to kill a guy; I think it was a relative, cousin or something who was messing around with his wife."

"You'd never think it to look at him," said Hobe.

"No, but then a lot of us look normal," said Augie.

"Normal?" said Hobe. "Or do you mean law-abiding?"

"I guess I do."

"There are guys in here you'd never take for murderers," said Hobe. "Like old Rainey and Vic and Charlie Tate. But they are even though they look harmless."

"And there are just as many outside, I guess," said Augie.

"But they ain't been caught yet," Hobe said.

They nodded and looked at Larry, perhaps recalling that he too was in this category. He returned their gaze for a minute and then said, "We better get back in our bunks. The check will be coming by soon."

They lay quiet later when the bedcheck guard peered in. When he passed, Augie bent down from his top bunk and said to Larry, "How many guys you figure'll be in the infirmary when we go?"

"It's hard to say, Feldman says they average eight to ten men a night there."

"You think they'll all come?" Hobe sat up in his bunk across the way.

"Maybe not all, but some at least."

"I'd like it better if it was just the four of us," said Augie.

"Me too," said Larry. "But it can't be helped. And once we're outside the wall, we can split up."

"Outside the wall," Augie repeated softly. "Ain't that something, though? Just talking about it makes

up for some of the lousy days we been here."

"And we're gonna do more than just talk about it," said Hobe.

"That's right," said Larry. "From now on for the next week or two, we can make sure we overlook nothing."

"You want me to write to my sister for the cake, in the morning?"

"Not yet," said Larry. "We have to time it so it comes the day before. That way we can spend that night in the infirmary."

"How about me trying to get another rope?" asked Hobe.

"If you like, but watch your step."

"And what can I do?" asked Augie.

"Just go to sleep for now," Larry grinned up at him.

"Jesus, I ain't gonna sleep now, not with all this to think about."

"I know," said Larry.

They lapsed into silence. Now and then Augie or Hobe asked another question and Larry replied. Afterward they went back to thinking. The kid was right, Larry thought, everything has to go right. And it was almost like asking for too much for it all to go without a hitch. If they did get to the infirmary, maybe the guard there would hear them. Or maybe the doctor, or one of the other cons would act up. Or maybe Feldman would be found out, taken out of the infirmary. He went over it many times before he dozed off.

In the next few days, the plan was with him night and day. He tried to foresee every contingency and allow for it if possible. But the one point he hadn't taken into account, the one which hadn't even crossed his mind was that of getting a fourth man in the cell. And this came about one evening toward the end of that week when they returned from the mess hall.

He was a tall dark man around thirty-five or forty. He introduced himself as Roger Varney and told them he was in for manslaughter two, seven to ten. He looked a quiet type, round face with dark eyes and thinning brown hair. He said he had been out in Joliet for three years and brought here, he didn't know why. As Hobe and Augie asked him questions, Larry kept watching him. He looked placid and reserved; not a hard type at all. And sensible by the sound of him. When Hobe asked him if he had ever tried to break out of Joliet, he grinned and shook his head. "Not exactly, I was planning a break with another con, but then he got sick and died."

"Suppose a chance came along to break out of here," Augie grinned to show the question was hypothetical, "would you take it?"

"Are you kidding? Of course."

"Even though you might be up for parole in a couple or three years?" asked Hobe.

"Even then," Varney looked at them all in turn. "The way I look

at it, any man who don't try to break out—I mean any that have a year or more to do—well then they're half dead already and don't know it."

"And you'd rather break out instead of finishing your sentence and getting out clean?" asked Larry.

"Clean?" Varney looked at him. "When are you ever clean once you've been inside? Still got to report each week, stay around home, no doing this or that. That ain't no treat either. I'd rather be out on my own, even if it means the run. I got a wife and kid I haven't seen in almost a year."

"How come you were sent here?" Larry asked. "You live around here?"

"My wife moved east and they transferred me so I could be closer to home, I guess."

Hobe and Augie were asking him about Joliet when a guard came and took him for a haircut and a few other minor details. When they were alone, the two looked at Larry and Hobe said, "What do you think?"

Larry shrugged. "I don't know, how about you?"

"He looks all right," said Augie.

"He looks fine, but how do we know who or what he is?" said Hobe.

"What do you mean?" asked Augie. "He's a con just like we are."

"How do we know? Why can't he be one of these Federal stoolies they shift from one prison to another just to get information and find out which cons are planning to break out?"

"No reason I guess, but he just don't look like it."

"I thought we decided the other night that you can't tell a damn thing by looks, not in here at least?"

"I guess that's right," said Augie. He looked at Larry and said, "Do you wanna leave him out of it then, and not take any chances?"

Larry rubbed his brow. "Maybe there's a way we can check up on him."

"How?" asked Hobe.

"He has to get shots and things in the infirmary, maybe Feldman can get a look at his record for us."

"You think he can?"

"It's worth a try."

"Why go to all that trouble?" asked Augie. "If we're not sure of him, why not leave him out of it altogether?"

"Because I hate to see any guy stay in here any longer than necessary," said Larry. "So if he's straight and wants to come, I'd hate to turn him down."

"Okay with me," said Hobe. "Let's check on him."

"Right," Augie said to Larry. "If you say so."

By the next evening, Larry had word and told the other two when Varney was downstairs having his uniform fitted. "Feldman says he was at Joliet and he is in for manslaughter two. And also that he's up for parole in two years."

"You think that's enough to go on?" asked Hobe.

"It's as much as we know about each other here," said Larry.

"How do you mean?" asked Augie.

Larry looked at the kid. "What do you know about me? That I'm a lifer, been here almost a year and came from Holdale where I was for two years? But how do you know all these things are so?"

Augie shrugged. "I guess I don't. It's just that I think I know you."

Larry nodded. "That's what we have to go by mostly. I don't know for sure that Hobe here has been in for four years, that he's charged with manslaughter one and that he's not a stoolie. The same with you; six months here, grand larceny, a sister who sends you packages. How do any of us know anything about each other?"

"I guess that's so," said Hobe. "We just got to take each other on face value."

"And by living together like we are," said Augie.

"That doesn't always make any difference," said Hobe.

"Well I know one thing," said Augie. "I know both of you are straight."

Larry looked at Hobe and grinned. "You see we have got him fooled."

They turned to the kid and Augie grinned too. "All right, maybe I'm stupid, but I know you're both all right. In fact," he paused.

"What?" asked Hobe.

Augie's grin faded and he said, "You're the best I ever met. I never had as good friends even when I was outside."

Hobe extended his arm and punched Augie gently on the shoulder. Larry grinned at him warmly and they went back to discussing the newcomer.

At one point, Hobe said, "Look, if we don't want to take any chances with him, we can let him come to the infirmary with us, you know, take a pill like we do, and not let him in on anything until we're ready to go over the wall. Then we can put it to him at the last moment. If he still wants to come, he can. If he don't, no harm done. How does that sound, Larry?"

"That might be a good idea," said Larry. He turned to the kid "How does it sound to you?"

"Yeah, okay. We can do that and be safe."

When Varney returned in the brownish-gray uniform they all wore, it seemed to Larry the newcomer was really one of them. And that opinion grew through the evening as they chatted after lights out, with Varney telling them about Joliet and how there as well as in all pens, The Thought most cons had was of escape.

Larry even had a dream about it that night. A variation of the escape-theme, this time he and several unknown men were in the

process of going over the wall when a light played up on him. At first he thought it was a guard and then he turned to see one of the uniformed men in on the escape with him shining a flashlight up at him. He woke up with the memory that he couldn't see the man's face.

The next day was Sunday. Just after dinner, a guard came to say Augie's sister had come to see him. As he got ready to go out, Augie whispered to Larry if he should say anything about the cake and Larry told him to ask her to be ready to send it when he sent word. The three men remaining in the cell sat about listening to a glee club singing somewhere in the building. Hobe and Varney were playing checkers while Larry stood near the window thinking about his dream while he smoked. At one point when he turned to look Varney over, the newcomer became aware of the look and lifted his head to meet the gaze. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Larry shook his head, turning to the window. From here, he could see the thick greenness of the woods beyond the gray wall. Above the trees, light brown hills rose up toward the horizon. If they did get beyond the wall, there was still the woods and the mountains to contend with. Yet, somehow, these seemed the least of the problem. In fact, as he smoked and gazed at the cloudy sky, Larry kept feeling that the rigors outside the wall meant nothing. It was the getting out that posed the big hurdle. Anl the getting out loomed harder and harder to accomplish. Was the dream an omen? Why had Varney been brought in just now?

That evening, Feldman sent word that things were set at his end. He would be on duty all the following weekend—Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings—and that he had the blade and the hook ready and hidden away. Larry sent word back that he too was ready and that one more man had been added to the party.

With the decision of not telling Varney anything, the cellmates were unable to iron out details of the plan. And this was another small irritation Larry found with the newcomer. Added to Varney's endless chatter, his over-friendliness and his ingratiating manner which had already roped in both Hobe and Augie, Larry felt an inner suspicion which he couldn't put aside. Perhaps it was just a natural reaction now that they were coming so close to the actual try. Or maybe it was just nerves exaggerating the whole affair. Nevertheless, Larry wished Varney worked in the metal shop or the laundry instead of in the cord shop where none of them could keep tabs on him.

On Monday Augie sent the letter for the cake; they figured, from the last cakes sent, it would arrive either Saturday or Sunday. On Tuesday, Larry got the length of rope which he kept wrapped

around his waist at all times. On Wednesday Hobe reported the second hacksaw blade was not to be had, as yet. But he would keep trying. But on Thursday they got the four pills to take when the cake arrived. This posed another problem.

Late Thursday night when Varney was asleep, Hobe and Larry talked it over. Augie seemed to be asleep too so they mused on the best way to make the newcomer take the pill, without having to tell him what it was.

"Some kind of cold tablet?" asked Hobe.

"Or vitamin," said Larry. "Maybe that'll be better."

Hobe nodded. "You feel all right about him, don't you?"

"Why?" Larry stared.

Hobe checked to see if Varney was still sleeping before sitting on Larry's bunk again. "I don't know. The way you been looking at him the last few days. You feel there's something funny about him?"

"No, I guess not."

"I think he's okay," said Hobe. "But we'll still play it safe and not tell him."

Augie came awake above them and hung his head down. "What is it? What's going on?"

"Nothing," said Larry. "Let's all get some sleep."

But he lay awake a long time after the others slept. The rope itched against his skin and he loosened it a bit. Then he lit a smoke and listened to the steps of the guards, the snoring that grew into low humming sounds. It seemed he had been caught up in this heavy silence and harsh captivity so long he couldn't remember when he had been on his own. For a while he went over memories of his wife and the home they'd had. But then he cursed himself for looking for the pain in it all. She was the real cause of his killing Farrell. He should've killed her instead of the man she had led on for so long. It hadn't been jealousy; after a time he no longer cared what she did. It had been simply rage and maybe pride. Anger against Farrell for being a damned fool, getting mixed up with her, and pride that he had in himself. The belief that she wasn't going to make a jackass out of him any more; not if he had anything to say about it. The judge, on sentencing him, said the only reason Larry wasn't to be hanged was because there was no premeditation. But he added the murder had been as cold and cruel as any he had ever seen.

As he saw it now, he had been naive. Marrying late and then expecting a person like Madge to be faithful. She was too beautiful and passionate, a friend told him, for one man, for marriage. He saw it too late and after the murder, he thought for a long time on the subject of fidelity. It had become so rare, so unnatural that once in prison he finally accepted it as a fact of life. More so inside. Cons stuck together against authority no matter

what. Any one who didn't, for whatever reason, was dealt with a good deal harder than on the outside. Larry recalled the man in Holdale, suspected of being a stoolie, who was stabbed right in the mess hall, amid several hundred men. And no trace was found of the knifer.

An old-timer there explained it to Larry before he was transferred. "You got to remember," the man said, "the con ain't got much going for him. He's locked up like an animal; he's told when to eat and sleep, he's pushed around like a slave, not much room for self-respect. So the big thing is sticking together. Only the fact that other cons are in the same boat makes it a bit easier. So the brotherhood is a natural thing; even if there's rapers, kidnappers, child-molesters and worse among them, they have to get along and hold out against the guards and wardens. That's why stoolies get no pity; they're worse than the lowest cons when they turn on their own and sell out to the cops. And the planted stoolie, the fed in con's clothes, he's the worst kind of all. He's a spy and really ain't got no excuse for what he does."

He got up quietly and went to the window. When the guard came around into view, Larry began to count, double-checking the time it took this man to make a tour of the grounds. He was up to a hundred and ninety seconds when the guard reappeared. Over three minutes, unless the guard on their night differed the routine. That was another chance they had to take. One of the many that kept coming to mind. But then he gazed out across the many stars and had a deep, savage pang to be out, away from these damn walls and bars, the dead smells and the deadlier quiet. The chances would have to be taken.

There was no change the next day, Friday. Exchanging a few words with Feldman's crony in the mess hall, Larry told him no package today and the man in turn said seven men were in the infimary and that Feldman said any time they were set, he was. Larry peered at the man, short, wiry and dark. "You going too?"

"You crazy? I only got a few months to do."

Larry nodded. "Good luck."

"You too," said the man.

In the cell later, talk was very slow. Only Varney chatted easily. He and Hobe compared notes on their manslaughter charges; and Varney went on to describe other cons with manslaughter in Joliet. All the while, Larry kept stealing glances at him. And he thought, if the man was a ringer, he was a good one. When Varney talked of his wife and their life together, Larry felt he had to be wrong. It wasn't possible for a man to make up so much, not so effortlessly. Unless Varney had been doing this for years. By the time they got to bed,

Larry had a change of heart. He had no proof only a faint feeling against the man; and that wasn't fair. Until he had gotten to know Hobe and Augie, he'd been cool toward them too. So he resolved to give Varney the benefit of the doubt, but still play it safe.

They worked half a day on Saturday; and when they got to the cell just before lunch, the package lay on Augie's bunk. He picked it up and looked at the return address. "Looks like another cake," he nodded to Larry and Hobe. They nodded too and Hobe said, "When we come back from mess, we can have a little dessert."

"Right," said Augie.

Larry dug the pills out of his shirt pocket. "Oh, yeah, I almost forgot. I got some vitamin pills from a friend down in the kitchen. One for each of us. And maybe I can get more in time." He handed one to Hobe then Augie. Varney took his looking doubtful. "Vitamin?" he looked at Larry.

"They're good to have, in case you don't like the slop we get downstairs, you'll have something in your belly."

"That's right," said Hobe. He filled the glass at the small sink and drank his pill down, then handed the glass to Augie who did the same before passing the glass to Varney. He still looked doubtful and Hobe told him, "Go ahead, take all you can get out of this place, that's my motto."

Varney smiled at him and swallowed his pill and drank. He gave the glass to Larry who followed suit. He then put the glass back and said, "If we can get enough of these, we won't have to eat any of their slop."

"A regular hunger strike," Hobe grinned.

In the mess hall, Feldman's crony wasn't at his usual spot behind counter. Larry kept looking around as did Hobe. Their eyes met and Hobe shook his head sadly. The first trouble spot, thought Larry. He scanned the hall while he ate, trying to figure how to get word to Feldman that this was the night. But there was no way, none that would seem innocent and he decided to forego this part. Feldman would know when they got into the infirmary later, that was good enough. He was ready, he said so.

Back in the cell, Augie opened the package to show the rich-looking chocolate cake. He gave out the pieces while Hobe kept saying he wanted to meet this sister who made such good stuff, that she had to be a fine cook. Varney raised a hand when his piece came and said, "I don't think so, I'm pretty full."

"On what we had to eat?" asked Augie. "Come on, there's a lot here. I can't eat it all, alone."

Varney was finally persuaded and they ate in silence. Larry and Hobe exchanged a glance. "Tastes fresh," said Hobe.

"It should be," said Augie, "un-

less they held it downstairs while they checked it."

"Seems pretty good," said Larry.

The talk swung to their favorite foods as they whiled away the restful afternoon. Larry kept feeling his forehead and gazing intently at the faces of the others. There was a faint chill over his back and neck and his stomach didn't feel too steady.

Before long, Hobe complained of a stomach ache. "With that damn food they give us, I'm surprised it don't happen more often."

Varney took several deep breaths and swallowed hard. "I feel kind of queasy too. Maybe we're both coming down with something."

But a check of Augie and Larry showed that they all suffered from a chill and heaviness of the stomach. That started them on the food they had for lunch. "Pea soup," said Hobe, "vegetables and that stuff they called beefsteak."

"Maybe that was it," said Larry. "Did we all eat the steak?"

There were nods all around. Hobe poured out some water and passed it around after he drank. "God damn lousy food," he murmured. Then his face brightened and he said, "Wouldn't it be something if the whole block was sick from it? Boy we could really put on a hunger strike."

He went to the door and called into the next cell. "Hey, Jake."

"Yeah?" a voice replied.

"Anybody sick in there?"

"Sick?"

"Yeah, upset stomach, nauseous, anything like that?"

There was a moment's pause and the voice said, "No, why?"

"Never mind, tell you later."

As they kept looking at each other, it was seen that Hobe and Varney had flushes spreading over their faces. "How do you feel?" Larry asked the newcomer.

"The same, and kind of warm too."

Larry felt his forehead. "I think you got a bit of a temperature."

"Me too," Augie felt his head.

"I feel like I want to heave," said Hobe. "What the hell is it? Is it the lunch we had?"

"Then why only us?" asked Larry. "Jake's boys are all right, ain't they?"

Hobe nodded and then tried the cell on the other side. No one was ill there either and they looked at each other. Finally Larry said, "The only thing we had that nobody else had was the cake."

They stared at the open package on Augie's bunk. "But we ate those cakes before and they never bothered us," he said.

"What else could it be?" asked Hobe.

Varney slumped down on Hobe's bunk, holding his stomach. "I think . . ." he began, ". . . I'm going to have to vomit, I can't seem to swallow . . ."

He rose and Larry led him into the little toilet cubicle they had in

the cell. The three of them stood outside listening to Varney. And Hobe whispered, "That god damn Feldman, what in hell did he give us?"

"Whatever it was, it's doing the trick," said Larry.

"But he didn't have to make it so strong."

Varney reappeared with less color in his face; but there were a few spots of color about his neck and chin.

"How do you feel?" asked Larry.

"A little better, but weak."

"You didn't flush the toilet?"

"No, I guess I forgot," Varney started back to do so when Larry stopped him.

"Leave it," said Larry, "if this is some kind of food ailment, the guards'll want proof. So we'll stick their damn heads right in it."

Varney couldn't get up on his bunk and Hobe let him slump on the lower one. Larry bent over both and looked at Augie. "How're you, kid?"

"Not much better. I got a stomach ache and my head feels kind of hot."

Larry felt all their heads and then said, "What in hell are we waiting for?" He stepped to the door and called out, "Hey, Perkins, 319." He repeated the call several times until the guard arrived.

"What's wrong?" asked Perkins, peering in through the bars.

"We're all sick," said Larry.

Perkins' suspicion was plain. "How sick are you?"

"Stomach aches and fevers. Varn already threw up and the rest of us feel the same."

Perkins eyed them in turn and then told them to move back against the wall. He called another guard to the door before he opened it and went to the toilet. He flushed it and moved toward them. "This ain't some kind of trick, is it?"

"You saw the toilet," said Larry. "And look at their faces," he pointed to Hobe, and Varney who was red again. "And we all got temperatures too."

Perkins stepped close and felt Augie's head. "How come? What brought this on?"

"We think it's that cake," said Larry. "We all had some."

The guard went to Augie's bunk and studied the open package. While he did, Hobe said, "Mr. Perkins?"

"Yeah?" he turned.

"I think I got to heave too!" Hobe held his stomach and shook his head.

Perkins waved his club toward the cubicle and nodded. Hobe went in and again they all listened. He flushed the water and returned to his place. "Okay," said Perkins, "maybe you are sick. Just wait for a minute."

He sent the second guard down the corridor. In a moment the head guard of the block was back, Mr. Baines. He looked them over and listened to Perkins. He even felt a

head or two before nodding to Perkins and leaving, without a word. Perkins motioned them out into the hall. He picked up the cake, tucked it under his arm and then marched them down to the infirmary.

If Feldman weren't on duty, they would've had to submit to a stomach pumping. But he talked the doctor out of it and each of them was put to bed and given a kind of tranquilizer pill. Their temperatures ranged from 102 to 104. And when the fevers finally began to drop and the doctor left, Larry took Feldman aside and said, "What did you give us, anyway?"

He grinned as he looked around. "Sorry they were so strong; but I had to get your temperatures up to the mark or they wouldn't have been any good."

"They were more than good," said Hobe. "Take my word for it."

Varney was in the farthest bed and couldn't make out their words.

Feldman checked their pulses and temperatures, blood pressure and even samples of blood. "Where's the cake now?" asked Larry.

"They left it in the lab across the way. The doctor'll check it later."

"Will he report on it tonight?"

"I doubt it, nothing much gets done on Saturday afternoon. Maybe tomorrow or even Monday."

"That'll be soon enough," Larry whispered. "Everything all set?"

"Yeah, right after supper. We'll be alone then."

"We couldn't get word to you we were coming."

"I know, but I expected you any time."

"How about the guard outside?"

"He never comes in. I think we'll be all right."

"And them?" Larry nodded toward the other patients.

"A couple of pneumonia, one with flu, one with an ulcer. You don't have to worry about them. I'll be giving them sleeping pills later."

"None of them know anything?"

"No, how about him?" Feldman nodded toward Varney.

"He don't know anything either. When we get out, he can come or stay, as he likes."

"He took a pill, then?"

"Yeah, and was the first one to get sick."

"He's earned his shot at it," Feldman grinned.

Larry wanted to tell him of his suspicions but thought better of it. The first step was done; now they had to get outside the building and then only the wall remained. He adjusted his rope and began to feel the plan really had a chance, for the first time. Now if the guard didn't come in or the blade break, or the doctor return or even one of the other patients squeal on them—perhaps they would get out yet.

He looked at his friends. Hobe had his eyes closed and was breathing softly. Augie stared up at the ceiling, smoking a cigarette. And

Varney lay on his side, his face turned away. Even if he were a stoolie, which Larry now thought unlikely, how could he get word out? First of all he knew nothing, as yet. And if he did, they were all around him, to make sure he could pass no message.

The doctor made one last appearance at supper time. He and the guard came in as the patients were given their different foods. Larry and the others were given a light chicken soup. The doctor checked them and said they didn't look as though they had been serious at all, such a short time ago. When Larry asked if he had tested the cake, he said only a few preliminary checks and that he would go over it more thoroughly tonight or tomorrow.

When the food was taken out and they were alone with Feldman, Larry asked him softly. "When?"

"In a little while, as soon as things settle down and I give the men their sleeping pills."

"Is the other orderly gone for the night?"

"Yeah, I'm on alone."

"I'd like to see that window. How big is it?"

"Not too big, that might be another problem."

"What?"

"The bars are pretty close together. We might have to cut through two of them."

"You think so?" Larry stared at him.

"Maybe. And another thing. I don't know if the guard out on the grounds'll be able to hear us when we're sawing."

"I never thought of that," said Larry. "He walks out pretty far toward the wall, maybe he won't."

Feldman shrugged. "If it looks like he will, we'll just have to cut when he's on the other side of the building."

"About two minutes out of the three it takes him," said Larry.

"Yeah, that's what I figure. I timed him too."

They looked at each other. "You get some oil?" asked Larry.

"Yeah. All set, as soon as it's pretty well settled."

"You want to go try a few cuts and I'll listen from here, to see how loud it sounds?"

Feldman glanced at the patients. "Okay, just a couple."

He went out and Larry saw the others looking at him. He put his finger to his lips for silence and they all listened while Varney glanced at them in puzzlement. In a moment, Larry heard the dull grinding sound. It sounded odd and loud in the quiet. He turned to see if any of the patients had noted it; but none seemed to. He then looked toward the door and back to his friends. "Loud," said Hobe.

Larry nodded. And when Feldman came back they told him so. "I know," he said. "It sounded like a hell of a racket in there. What're we gonna do?"

"We got to soften it somehow,"

said Larry, "even if the cutting takes longer."

"Come on with me to the supply room," said Feldman. "And we'll see what we can figure out."

Larry got to his feet and found he was weak and shaky. He grinned and moved to Hobe. "Keep an eye on the others and the door, we'll be right back."

For the next few moments, they tried soap and oil, cloth and paper, even several cream ointments Feldman dug up; but none of these lessened the harsh rasp of the saw against the metal. Larry stepped back and gazed at the window. Feldman had been right; with the bars 3 inches apart as they were, two bars would have to be cut before there was enough space.

"What now?" asked Feldman.

Larry shook his head, gazing out into the space between building and wall. The lights from the towers played about for a moment and as they did so, he heard a faint hum. "What's that?"

"The electric power makes that noise when the lights are on."

They watched and waited. When the lights came on again in fifteen minutes or so, the hum returned. And it lasted the several moments the beams ranged back and forth. When darkness returned, Larry said, "That sound should be louder outside the building, right?"

"The hum? I guess so, why?"

"It'll cover us against the outside guard."

"Maybe, but what about in here?"

Larry turned to the door, shut it and gazed at the crack under it and on top. "We'll just plug it up with some rags."

"You think that'll do it?"

"Let's try it and see."

When they did, Larry stood back in the ward listening with the others. The rasp was still audible, but not so loud and noticeable. "Much better," Larry told him. "The guard in the hall'll never hear it now."

"That leaves only the guard outside."

"And if we keep an eye on him, going only when the electricity hums, it might be all right there too."

"It'll mean cutting only for a minute or two at a time, and then waiting fifteen. That means most of the time we'll just be waiting."

"We can still do it," said Larry, "we got all night."

"We'll need it," Feldman shook his head.

They explained it all to the others. Hobe too remarked that most of the night would be lost in waiting. But Augie said they could still do it, taking turns. Varney kept listening silently and when Feldman went to check his patients, Larry moved to the newcomer. "I guess you're wondering what this is all about."

"A break, is that it?"

"That's right, we're trying it tonight, through the bathroom window next door."

"I see. That's why we were brought down here."

"Yeah, sorry about making you so sick. But we couldn't leave you in the cell; it would've looked funny. Now the question remains, do you want to come with us or not? No hard feelings either way."

Varney looked at them all and then said, "Of course I want to come. Why not?"

"We don't know how it'll go," said Larry. "It's a risk and if you don't want to take it, it's okay. We sort of shanghied you in on the deal in the first place."

"Maybe so, but I still want to come with you."

Larry looked at his two friends and they nodded. "Okay," said Larry. "When he tells us we can start, we'll take turns cutting. It shouldn't be long now."

Feldman returned and they huddled. It was decided that two men would stay at the window; one to time the guard and the lights with Feldman's watch and the other to work when able. When the cutter was relieved by the timer, a new man came in to take the watch. Thus, each of the five, would have a turn at both jobs and also at keeping watch at the door of the ward and also a guard against the other patients. Feldman took Hobe with him and said in half an hour the next man should go in. Larry nodded and moved toward the door.

He sat on the empty bed nearest the door and pretended to read by the faint light over the door; while he did, he noted only one or two of the patients were still awake. And they too were growing drowsy. The sound of cutting soon came to him and he looked at Augie and Varney. They stared back and at the patients warily until the sound stopped. Augie shook his head, "Still kind of loud."

"It'll be all right," said Larry, noting the guard's shadow moving under the door. When it stopped, he went back to his bed.

They smoked and listened. The whole area was quiet but for the snoring of the patients. The stillness seemed weighted with meaning and as he stared at Varney, Larry had the doubt back again. The waiting, he saw, was going to be the worst part of the whole business.

The cutting sound came to them again. Shortly after it stopped, Feldman appeared and told Augie to join Hobe. "How is it going?" Larry asked him.

"Slow, it'll take all night at this rate."

Larry noted by the clock over the main door it was almost nine. "How far in did you cut?"

"Very little. Two minutes at a clip ain't much."

"Yeah, I know," said Larry. "It comes out to about eight minutes for each hour. But if you multiply that by ten hours roughly, you have eighty minutes, and that should be enough for two bars, don't you think?" Larry turned to Varney.

"Forty for each, it should be," Varney nodded.

They fell into a silence and waited until the next sawing took place.

"It does sound loud," said Feldman.

"In here," Larry nodded. "But I don't think he can hear it," he motioned to the door.

Feldman moved there and listened while Larry kept his eye on the sleeping men. When the sound stopped, Feldman returned. "I don't know, it don't seem possible we can keep it up that loud all night and not be heard."

"You got any other ideas?" asked Larry.

The medic shook his head. "Not off hand."

"It sounds loud to us," said Varney. "But from here on, the walls and doors soften it."

"I hope you're right."

When Hobe came out, Larry went in. Augie stood on the toilet box, saw in hand looking down at him. Larry picked up the watch that Augie pointed to and asked, "How is it going?"

"Hard stuff," Augie fitted the blade into the slight groove of the first black bar. "They'll take a lot of cutting."

Larry wedged the rags tight around the door and came back, gazing at the small square window. "We'll have to cut two bars, then?"

"Yeah, make about a nine inch opening. That should be enough."

Larry nodded, looking down at the watch. "How long a wait do we have now?"

"About twelve or thirteen minutes. They been putting on the lights every thirteen to fifteen minutes; and they leave them on from three to four minutes."

"That's good. How about the guard?"

"He took almost four minutes the last time. But we been going with the two minute rule. Hobe said no use taking any unnecessary chances. We'll still have plenty of time to do two bars."

As they kept looking at each other, Larry said, "How do you feel?"

"Still got a chill and feel dizzy," Augie grinned. "But I ain't had much chance to worry about it."

Larry stood on the box with him and they gazed out into the darkened grounds. A short time later Augie said, "There he is." They watched the guard out near the wall slowly saunter by, smoking a cigarette.

"He should make another swing by before the lights go on," said Augie.

Larry studied him. "I don't know if we didn't make a mistake in getting you in this."

"No mistake," Augie said calmly, surprisingly so, Larry thought. "I wanted to come."

"Yeah, but if we do get out, it'll mean the run from now on."

"I don't care, as long as I can stay with you and Hobe, I don't care about anything."

"Well, the first thing is to get out, then we'll see."

The guard came by again, walking slow and easy as before. He never stopped or wavered in his path. He seemed an automation and Larry felt a small flick of doubt. Were things going too good? he mused. And then shook his head at the endless thoughts that beset him.

The lights came on and Augie began to saw. From here, Larry found the sound shattering. He spotted the time on the watch and bent closer as Augie used one hand to drop oil on the blade which went back and forth, in great rasping tearing noises. Augie looked at him and said, "Yeah, I thought it was too loud too, but so far . . ." he shrugged.

Larry kept peering into the grounds outside and checking back at his watch. When the two minutes were up, he tapped Augie on the shoulder and the boy stopped. They peered at the cut; it was almost a third of the way through the bar which looked to be about an inch in diameter.

"We're getting there," said Augie.

He put the blade down and flexed his right hand. "At least the two minute stretch keeps you from getting sore; and it helps the blade to cool off. Less chance of breaking it."

The guard returned at the three minute mark. When he was out of sight, the lights went out. "Another go for me and then Varney comes in," said Augie.

Larry nodded. He stayed at the window, holding the watch as Augie leaned at the wall watching him. "How's he taking it all?" he asked.

"Okay, I guess," said Larry. "He's eager to do his share."

"You feel sure now that he's okay?"

Larry turned to him. "As sure as you can be. Besides, if he's not, we got him with us now and there's not much he can do."

"I'm sure he's all right."

"I suppose he is, it's just the idea that after all this, all these months of planning, you hate to have it all go sour. . . ."

Augie met his gaze for a moment, nodded and turned to look out. For a moment Larry felt he didn't know him at all. But then the whole evening was unreal; with them being so close to success, each passing moment rendered the whole business more and more unbelievable.

It happened that when the lights came on again, the guard was due to swing past; so they had to wait.

"God damn him," said Larry. "Where is he?"

The lights swung back and forth but no guard showed; Augie had the saw in place ready to work and they waited, listening to the hum of the electricity going to waste. Larry kept looking at the watch; one minute passed and then almost two be-

fore the guard appeared. They saw him walking at a brisker pace and when he was gone, Augie went at it hard until the lights went out, the hum stopped and several strokes of the saw cut into the stillness like a bomb.

They looked at each other and outside. At last Larry said, "Okay, go on out and send Varney in."

Larry took his place with the saw; Varney appeared, fixed the rags around the door. Just as he had them set, a tapping came on the door and he opened it to see Feldman and a patient standing there. "This guy has to go," said the medic.

They all looked at the man, skinny and unshaven who stared at Larry, the saw and the cut bar.

"Now look," Feldman told him. "We're getting out; if you and any of the others want to come with us, you're welcome. But come or stay, keep quiet, understand?"

"I understand," said the man. "But I ain't about to break out. I'm in piss poor shape and besides, I only got eight or nine more months to go."

"Okay, that's up to you. Now do your business and get back in there."

The man relieved himself and went out with Feldman. Varney put the rags back in place and joined Larry.

"Everything quiet out there?" asked Larry.

"Yeah, they're all asleep but for that one. And the guard hasn't stirred," Varney picked up the watch. Larry explained the timing to him and they waited for the guard's next tour. With the blade in his hand, set into the cut of the bar, Larry was tempted to begin. With each passing moment, their pace seemed slower and more unbearable. That outer wall seemed to be closer each time he looked at it and he fingered the rope under his belt.

The guard passed and Varney said, "Three and a half minutes."

"Let's hope he's synchronized with the lights this time."

Larry became aware of the other's staring and when he turned, he saw Varney watching him. "I just wanted to thank you for letting me come along."

Larry shrugged. "We ain't out yet."

"I know, but I wanted to say this. I know it's mainly your idea, you and Feldman. And that you had the final say on who was to come. So I wanted to tell you I'm grateful. I know coming in to a cell like I did just a few days ago, most guys wouldn't have let me, like you did. And I couldn't blame them; it's a big risk."

Larry watched him as he checked the time and looked up again. "I couldn't have said a thing if you didn't let me in on it. But now that you did, well . . . you know how I feel."

"Forget it."

"I was lucky all the way around,

being put in your cell. I saw that the first day. The way you and Hobe and Augie get long. I been in a lot of cells and it was always the same. Guys always out to knife each other, fighting and arguing all the time. It's really rare when three or four guys get on like you do. That's why I got a feeling this thing is gonna work."

"I hope so. It's taken a long time to set up."

"It'll work, it has to. Look at the good start we got."

"We still got a way to go yet."

Varney was looking at him again intently. "What did you do before you came in here?"

"A number of things, truck-driver, laborer, mechanic and others."

Varney nodded. "And after we get out?"

"It'll be a full-time job just to stay out."

"I know what you mean. Can we stick together after, do you think?"

Larry gazed at him. "It wouldn't be smart."

"No, I guess not. Still, maybe we can see each other . . ."

They peered out and Larry kept thinking of his suspicions toward this man. If I were a stoolie, he mused, would I play it as warm and mushy as this? Or would I go at it faintly cool and hard? It was a pretty tricky job, at best.

The guard returned; he was gone for a moment when the lights came on. Larry drove the blade hard. It grew hot and he kept dropping the oil. Then Varney tapped him and he stopped. "Two minutes."

Larry paused and they listened to the light-hum, watching the searchlights go by the window. "These cross-timings are making us lose even more time."

"Yeah, but we still can do it."

Larry looked at the bar; it was more than half cut. He nodded. "I hope so."

Just as the guard came by again, the lights went out and the humming ceased. "That's it for another fifteen," said Larry. He cleaned the blade, laid it down and bent over the bar. After cleaning the cut out, he gripped the bar just above it and tugged with all his strength. But it didn't budge. "Would save us a lot of time if it gave."

"A bit more perhaps and it will."

They lapsed into a silence, gazing out. Soon, Varney was talking of other near-escapes he was involved in. "One was through a guard a few friends of mine were bribing. They figured they had him all sewed up; they promised to make it worth his while after they got out and they already saw to it that friends on the outside paid him a pretty good sum, just to persuade him. But then, the night before the escape was to go, they were taken to the warden's office. The guard was there and the whole story came out. Now they're all in for life."

"I don't think I would ever trust a guard," said Larry.

"I don't know. It's been done that way before. But I'd rather deal with cons. Less of a chance of a stoolie."

"Though there's always that chance, with them too."

"That's right. Maybe that's why I feel so good about this one. I think our cell is all straight. The only doubt I have, if any, is in that Feldman."

"He's done most of the work," Larry pointed out. "Suggested the plan to me, got the saw and everything. No, I feel safe about him."

"Then I feel good about the whole thing," said Varney. "With a little luck, we'll do it."

Larry got down to relieve himself; Varney followed suit and they resumed their positions. The silence of this area was much deeper than that of their own block. There were no steps going by and the sound of other men was very faint. It was all so odd and different that Larry felt they were no longer part of the prison. He thought of his latest dream as the guard returned.

The synchronizing was just right the next time the lights went on. Larry cut hard with all the pressure he could and when the two minutes were up, the blade had reached almost two thirds the way through the bar. He handed the saw to Varney and tugged again at the bar. "Another cut or two and this one ought to give."

"Won't be long now."

"See you later," said Larry, going out.

The ward was as before. The patients slept but for the one skinny man. The others asked Larry how it went and he told them. He looked at Feldman. "Everything okay here?"

Feldman nodded. "The guard's been moving up and down the hall outside, but so far I don't think he heard anything."

"And these boys?" Larry pointed to the sleeping men.

"Only that one man woke up," Feldman paused. "He was pretty leery for a while, afraid he'd be in trouble for being around while an escape went on. But I convinced him that since he's sick and supposed to be under sedation, he has a good alibi."

Larry glanced at the man who stared back. "Didn't he take a sleeping pill like the others?"

"Yeah, but when he got up and found out about this, he couldn't get back to sleep. So I gave him another one. He'll be dropping off pretty soon."

"Okay, I guess all we can do is go on like we are."

"Right, I better get out with the other guy," Feldman left the ward.

Larry sat between his friends while they asked questions about the work. "How long before this bar is cut through?" asked Hobe.

"Another turn or two, at most."

Hobe looked at the clock. "That means probably midnight or later."

"Almost four hours from when we started," said Augie.

Larry nodded. "If there's no changing in the routine, the timing."

"But the second bar should go quicker," Hobe pointed out.

As they thought this over, Varney began to cut. Larry stretched out on his bed and lit a cigarette. The oily-metal smell still clung to his fingers and reminded him of the metal shop where he worked. The cell and old block seemed far off in both time and space. Even the smells were different here, the disinfectant and iodine.

Though he wouldn't have thought it possible, Larry dozed off. When he woke up, Feldman was looking down at him and saying, "One bar is cut."

Larry sat up and shook his head. "What?"

"We're started on the second bar."

Larry turned to Varney and rubbed his eyes. Then he got out of bed quickly and said, "I had a smoke lit . . ."

"We put it out."

Larry sat again. It was twelve-fifteen on the clock. "Almost time for me to go in. I don't know how I slept."

"We're all pretty weak," said Varney.

Larry looked at Feldman. "Did you try to bend the bar?"

"Just a little, to see how hard it is. It'll bend all right. As soon as we get the second one cut, we'll bend them both."

"Nine inches?" asked Larry.

"A bit over nine," Feldman nodded. "I measured it one day. I've had a lot of time to think about all these odds and ends."

"How long have you been here?" Varney asked the medic.

"A little over two years."

"Got a parole coming up soon?"

"No, not for a good long while. And I'm not gonna sit around waiting for it."

Varney nodded. "I think we all feel the same."

"Only Contaldo has one coming up pretty soon," said Feldman. "That's why I was a bit surprised he was in on it."

"We tried to talk him out of it," said Larry. "But he wanted to come."

They heard the cutting and listened. "How's the blade holding out?" asked Larry.

"It'll last. Can't get overheated in two-minute shifts."

"If it breaks, we'll never make it."

"I have a feeling our luck'll hold out," said Varney.

"It's been good so far," said Feldman.

"Almost too good," murmured Larry. As they looked at him, he went on, "Maybe I'm just jittery, but I don't like it when things go too good. It's not normal."

The others took turns in telling him there had been troubles, problems of all kinds which they had surmounted and allowed for. "We've planned it pretty carefully,"

said Feldman, "and that's half the battle."

"You could be right," said Larry, "don't mind me. I've always been a pessimist."

When Hobe came out, Larry asked, "How is it going?"

"Good, we got a good start on the second bar already."

"Will there be enough space to get through?"

"Plenty, nine inches across and a foot up and down. We can all fit through that with ease."

Larry went in to join Augie, finding the kid leaning at the wall, testing the cut bar. When he saw Larry, he said, "Look." He pulled at the first bar and it moved in a bit. He pushed it out again into place, with only the slit about an inch from the bottom to show it had been cut.

"How's the guard?" Larry picked up the watch.

"Just went by, a new man went on at midnight."

"How is he?"

"Better than the first one; he comes around three minutes almost exactly."

"Nearer the building or what?"

"No, way out near the wall. I'm telling you, he's much better."

"Good."

As the unreality mounted, Larry had begun to scan them all more closely. Feldman and Varney had seemed cautiously optimistic, tense yet confident. From the glance he'd had of Hobe, the latter appeared confident too, though not quite so uneasy. And as he turned to Augie, he saw him waiting with the saw at the ready, a flush over his face. It was natural the kid felt the most uneasiness. "How do you feel?" Larry asked.

Augie turned and smiled slightly. "Okay."

"Nervous?"

"Yeah, I guess I am."

"It's these long waits between cutting. It's getting me too."

"Yeah, I guess that's what it is."

The lights soon lit and Augie sawed. When the lights went, Augie bent to examine the bar. "Coming along," he said.

He kept his head near the window looking out. His breath was fast and Larry said after a minute, "Sorry you came along?"

"Hell no, why?" Augie turned to him.

"I don't know, just that you look all in."

"I still feel weak and got a headache. But I'm okay."

Another long silence and Larry told himself it was different now. They weren't back in the cell where the kid used to chatter to him all the time. The kid was scared, they all were.

After his second cut, Augie put down the blade and jumped to the floor quickly. As Larry turned to him, he smiled, "Not much more now."

"No, you get some rest."

"I'm okay," he said and went out.

Varney soon came in and plugged the door. "How does it look?"

"Good," said Larry. "Though I don't know if I should say that."

"Why not, we worked hard and if it's good, it's good."

Larry grinned at him and then looked out. Varney kept up a stream of soft talk, a complete difference from Augie. After his two cuts, Larry put the blade down and said, "Well, your turn."

"Maybe I'll be the one to get through it," said Varney.

But there was still half the bar to go. Back in the ward, Larry could see the tension mounting in their faces. "How much more?" asked Feldman.

"Over half yet."

"It's getting on."

Larry saw it was twenty to two on the clock. "Another hour or two at the most."

Feldman nodded. "The earlier the better, give us that much more of headstart."

"What time does anybody come?"

"The guard opens the door at six and my relief at six-thirty."

"We still got four hours."

When Feldman left them, Larry lit a cigarette and looked at Hobe. The latter shook his head and said, "This waiting is murder."

Larry grinned and turned to Augie who lay on his bed. His eyes were on Larry and he nodded when asked how he felt. "Okay, I guess. Just kind of woozy yet. I'll be okay."

"Sure you will, take a nap. I'll wake you up."

Augie shook his head. "I couldn't sleep, not now."

They sat in silence. A short time later, Varney began to cut; then there was more silence. Larry heard a burp. He turned to Augie who looked very pale. "What's the matter?"

"I feel sick to my stomach," Augie said softly.

"You have to vomit?"

"I think so."

Larry hunted around until he found a bedpan. He put it on the floor near Augie's bed and said, "It's a delayed effect from the pill. I felt like I was going to be sick a couple of times."

Augie nodded, keeping his face averted. But several moments later, he lay back on the bed and closed his eyes. Hobe and Larry looked at each other and Hobe said, "I think we'll all be glad when this is over."

"True," murmured Larry.

It was almost three when the second bar was cut. Hobe was on the blade; he and Augie came into the ward and announced the news. Larry and Feldman went into the bathroom and Larry tried both bars. They bent out half way. Hobe applied his greater strength and soon had them out at right angles from the window. Larry unwound the rope from his waist and Feldman dug up the scythe which was tied to one end of the twenty feet of rope.

"Let's double check on guards and lights," said Larry.

"The guard is a minute gone and the lights nine," said Hobe.

"Okay, wait till the guard comes by again, then we'll have three minutes of darkness, even two and a half to get to the wall and over." He turned to Feldman, "What do you think?"

"If we get this hook up there with no trouble, it can be done."

There were nods all about and Larry said, "Hobe, since you made the last cut, you get the honor of going first. If you can fit through there, we all can."

Feldman made a last check of the ward and came back nodding all was quiet. They crowded near the window and the seconds were endless. At last the guard appeared. "Here he is," whispered Hobe. And when the man was gone, Hobe stepped up and put a leg through the opening. It was a tight squeeze but Larry gave him a shove. When he was out, Hobe said, "Come on."

Feldman went next, then Varney. Larry turned to Augie and said, "Okay, kid, go on."

"You go first," he said hesitantly.

"Come on, I'll be right behind you."

The kid looked scared and Larry helped him up and through almost roughly while saying, "It's okay. We're practically out now."

They huddled close to the wall of the building. It was very dark as Feldman peered at his watch. "Only a minute left of the guard's time."

"It's dark enough here, he can't see us," said Hobe. "Why don't we wait until he passes again?"

It was finally agreed and they waited. Augie was close to Larry and he could hear the kid's quick unsteady breath. He found the kid's hand and said, "Okay, we're on the homestretch." He paused and said, "Your hand is like ice. You okay?"

Augie's reply was so low it could hardly be heard.

"Take it easy," Larry patted his shoulder.

The guard returned; they waited in silence against the wall until he was out of sight. Feldman rose with the rope and moved toward the outer wall. That was when the lights came on. Not the large roving beams of the searchlights, but small numerous lights from their left approaching slowly. Feldman was caught in a beam too and told to move back by a gruff voice. When Larry could see beyond the lights, he made out half a dozen guards, all with guns drawn.

They were told to line up against the wall with hands raised. The rope and hook were found and then all were searched. Larry saw the warden appear out of the darkness. He looked at them all in turn and then moved close. "This was a mistake, you should've all known better. There's nothing more I can say." He nodded to a guard who

gave the order to march them back inside.

As they went through doors and gates, down into the solitary cells, Larry caught glimpses of the others. They looked as bad as he felt; eyes were down and heads hung low. He tried to turn, in order to see Augie but a guard told him to keep his eyes ahead. Into the darkened corridor and then a small stone cell with a thick iron door and all the time Larry kept trying to figure how, and who?

When they were locked up, he leaned against the wall and let the despair wash over him for a while. It finally gave way and he moved to the door, putting his mouth near the small opening. "Hobe?" he called out.

"Yeah?" the voice sounded from the next cell.

"You okay?"

There was a moment's pause. "Yeah, okay, the bastards."

"Feldman?" Larry called.

"Yeah, okay," the medic's voice was low and choked.

It took two calls to reach Varney who said he was all right too. By then Larry felt he should've called the kid first, and said, "Hey, Augie, where are you?

There was no reply. Larry tried again and then asked Hobe to try.

Still no reply and a guard came along saying, "That's enough noise."

"Where's the kid?" Larry asked him. "Is he all right?"

"You mean Contaldo?" said the guard.

"Yeah, is he okay?"

After a moment, the guard said in an amused tone, "The kid is all right, much better off than you are."

"Where is he?" Hobe asked.

"Upstairs, with the warden. Where else?" now the guard laughed outright. "How do you think we knew you were coming out tonight?" He was very much amused as he added, "Oh, yeah, the kid is doing fine, don't worry about him."

Larry backed away from the door until he was up against the rear wall. His throat was dry and his heart pounded. Weak from the pill and the sleepless night, his chill grew stronger. It seemed the chill of the stone walls and floor went right through him and he had to grit his teeth so that they wouldn't chatter.

It took a long time for his thoughts to rise above his anger. Then he almost marvelled at the acting all these months, the boyish air, the cakes and sister. It had been a damn good job. And now he understood the kid's behavior of this evening. All little bits and pieces fell into place.

There was a cry from the next cell. He heard Hobe yelling out into the dark, "Augie, you bastard, Augieeee."

The chant rang through the basement until the guard pounded on the door and stopped him. When

silence came again, Larry said "Hobe, can you hear me?"

"Yeah, it was him, you know it, Larry?"

"It was him, our kid . . ." Hobe started to say, but Larry cut him short.

"Hobe, listen, listen." A long silence and Hobe answered, "What?"

"It was him, we all know it now. But listen, forget it, forget him."

"Forget it?"

"We got to, don't you see?"

"I don't know, I don't know if I can."

"We got to, don't you see? We have to let it go right out of our minds as soon as we can. . . ."

Hobe's voice was lifeless and barely audible. "If he was here now, I'd kill him so easy. I swear it, Larry, if I could get my hands on him I would, so easy."

Larry tried again but the guard told them to shut up. He leaned back on the wall and tried to breathe easily. It was going to be hard to do, he knew it. His thoughts were going to be rough, thoughts like: all these months of waiting, and not Varney but the kid, and why, always why? But he had to put them down after a time, turn them off and keep them under control. And he would have to persuade Hobe, and the others. Forlorn and trapped here in the dark, that hope of forgetting in time and of trying again seemed the only thing between him and complete defeat.

double or nothing

One was Big Brother and the other Little Brother . . . but only their mother knew for sure.

BY W. SHERWOOD HARTMAN

Ed had called me Big Brother ever since I could remember. It was crazy. We were the same size, same height, same weight, but Mom said I was born first, so I was Big Brother. We were identical twins, so how she knew which one was born first, I could never figure out. But she could tell us apart and no one else could, so I guess she knew. Anyway, that's the way it worked out. I was Big Brother and Ed was Little Brother.

There was another thing that no one knew except Ed and Mom and me. Ed was smart, but I wasn't very bright. We had the same grades, though, all through school. I remember in grade school, after recess, Ed would switch seats with me; or we would go to the Boy's room together and switch when we got back. We always dressed the same, so the teachers were never sure of which one of us they were talking to.

While we were in High School, Ed had it figured out that I would always take the easy exams for the both of us and he would take the hard ones. That way, we were both honor students. We were both football heroes too, but that was my department. I was faster than Ed so we insisted on the same number, for luck, we explained. Ed played at halfback and I was the fullback, but it depended on who was to carry the ball as to how we lined up in the backfield.

We shared everything, even the girls. If Ed found a chick that was a real swinger, before too long, I'd take her out, and she never knew the difference. Sometimes, just for kicks, we'd both make it with the same chick on the same evening. Ed would take her first, then he'd stop at a drive-in for a coke and I'd be waiting to take his place. I don't know if any of the girls ever got wise, but we had the reputation of being a real virile guy.

We improved on that technique after we both had cars of our own. We'd take our dates to an outdoor movie, make out during the first show, then at intermission, we'd switch keys, cars and girls. The system was short on romance but long on variety.

After we finished High School, we both went to work at the bakery. I worked the day shift and Ed worked nights. Ed was too smart to be satisfied with a poor paying job like that, so he devised a method to augment our income. One day, about every two weeks, I would work my shift, then go home and change quickly into fresh clothes and go back and work for Ed. That night he would hit a couple of gas stations.

We did fine for about six months, then the axe fell. The funny thing was, it fell on *me* and I had been at the bakeshop covering for Ed every single time he had pulled a job.

The transmission had gone out of my car and it was in the garage, so I had borrowed Ed's car for my date that night. I had picked the chick up early and we had taken in a movie, then we went for a ride and parked for a while. She acted like making love was an Olympic marathon, so it was nearly four A.M. when we headed home. I noticed that the gas gauge was on the shaky side of empty so I pulled in at an all-night station.

The attendant didn't show for a little while, so I figured he was goofing off. I lit a cigarette and waited, then when I tapped the horn, all hell broke loose. Cops came from every direction. They yanked me out of the car, shook me down, then shoved me up against the window of the station. The gas station man was gleeful in his identification. In rapid succession, I was taken to the local jail, fingerprinted, booked for armed robbery, and given a very private room. I didn't like the bed.

Ed showed up the next morning with a lawyer. He must have checked through my clothes. He was wearing slacks and shoes that matched mine, a white shirt with no tie, but he was wearing a jacket, I hadn't worn one the previous evening.

The turnkey took us to the D.A.'s office and we all sat around the table listening to the D.A. tell about the bad trouble I was in. Ed stood up, complaining of the heat, took off his jacked and hung it on the back of his chair. When he sat

down, he nudged me with his knee and slipped his wallet under the table to me. I took out my handkerchief and wiped my face. When I put it back in my pocket, Ed's wallet went with it.

After the D.A. had finished with us, we shook hands with the lawyer. That's when we made the switch. We shuffled around the lawyer for a moment, then I put on Ed's jacket. The turnkey took him back to my cell and I left with the lawyer.

I didn't relish the idea of Ed sitting in jail for a couple of years on an armed robbery rap, but there didn't seem to be much I could do. Then, as I walked through the court-house with the lawyer, an idea began to take shape.

Ed had changed places with me because he didn't want me to take the rap for him. The way the D.A. had talked, they had an iron-clad case against him so there didn't seem to be much chance to spring him legally. My plan was risky and if it didn't work I would probably wind up in jail with Ed, but I decided to try it.

We paused, outside the court-house, and I asked the lawyer, "How does it look?"

"With that attendant's identification, he doesn't have a chance."

"What would you suggest?"

"Have him plead guilty. It's his first offense. He could be out in a year with good behavior."

"He's entitled to a trial, isn't he?"

"Sure, but what's the use. Besides the identification, they found a gun in the glove compartment of the car along with some checks that had been made out to the station. How can you buck odds like that?"

"We can try. I want him to stand trial."

"It'll be a waste of time and money," he shrugged, "but if that's what you want. . . . I'll be truthful with you, I don't have the foggiest idea of how to set up any defense in a case like this. Can you line up some character witnesses?"

"We won't need any. All you have to do is arrange it so I can sit in the front row behind your chair during the trial, close enough that I can cue you, then play it by ear."

"I think you're nuts, but it's your money."

The trial didn't take long. The prosecution called the gas station attendant first. He was very positive with his identification. He pointed to Ed, "He's the man that robbed me, and he's the man the police picked up when he was going to rob me again."

My lawyer started to get up to object. I tugged at his sleeve, "Shut up," I hissed. He glared at me, but he sat down.

"Cross examine?" the Judge rumbled.

I nudged the lawyer, "Later, tell him later."

My lawyer was on his feet. "The defense would prefer to defer cross-examination until the completion

of the prosecution's testimony."

"Very well. Next witness."

The next four witnesses were the cops that had picked me up. They were all very positive, too, that Ed was their man. They introduced the gun and the checks that they had found in the car into the evidence. Then, when the prosecution rested its case, I tapped our lawyer on the shoulder.

"Make them swear that it wasn't me," I whispered. He looked puzzled for a moment, then he beamed an enlightened smile as he got to his feet.

"The defense would like to recall the first witness for cross-examination."

Mr. Gas Station strutted confidently to the witness stand.

"You are aware of the fact that you're still under oath?"

"Yes."

"And you are certain that the defendant," the lawyer pointed to Ed, "is the man who robbed you and later returned and was arrested at your gas station?"

"Yes sir. He's the man."

The lawyer pointed to me. "Would you please rise?" I dutifully did so. He continued pointing to me as he asked the witness, "Are you absolutely sure, and remember, you're still under oath. . . . Are you certain that he wasn't the man that robbed you?"

Mr. Gas Station hesitated, but only for a second. He was too smart to be trapped. If he couldn't be sure of his identification, they had no case, and he knew it. "I'm positive that he isn't the man," he stated firmly.

"That's all," my lawyer said, dismissing him. The cops at the other table had their heads together and murmured briefly. As they were called to the stand, they each swore that I wasn't the man they had arrested.

The lawyer turned to me and we had a brief, whispered conference.

"Well, the bottom sure fell out of that idea. What do we do next?"

"Call the turnkey?"

"What the hell for?"

"To make sure that Big Brother is the same guy they arrested."

"He won't shake any more than the others."

"That's what I'm counting on. Just get him on the stand."

The lawyer shrugged in disgust, then he turned and addressed the court. "Your Honor, I would like to call the head security officer of the County jail as my next witness."

"Is he in the courtroom?"

"No, Sir, but it shouldn't take very long to locate him."

"Very well. Twenty minutes recess to call the next witness."

The baliff took Ed away, then the lawyer and I went out in the hall. As soon as we were alone, he asked angrily, "Are you trying to make me look like some kind of a nut? Just exactly what do you have in mind?"

I told him in as few words as

possible and when I was finished, he broke into a broad grin.

When the court reconvened, the turnkey took the stand. He swore that the defendant had been under constant surveillance from the time he had been booked.

"Did you follow standard police procedure when you booked him?" my lawyer asked.

"Yes."

"Did you take his fingerprints at that time?"

"I certainly did."

"That's all," my lawyer said, dismissing the witness. Then he addressed the court. "Your Honor, I would like to have the defendant fingerprinted and have his prints compared with the ones that were taken on the day he was arrested."

"What purpose will that serve, Counselor?" the Judge asked.

"It will prove that my client, the man who has been identified by all the witnesses in this court, is not the same man that was arrested and charged in this case. It will prove that my client is not guilty!"

I sat back and relaxed during the flurry of activity that followed. Ed was fingerprinted, then the expert huddled over his prints and the prints they had taken of me when I had been booked. He studied the prints through a dual microscope, shook his head in disbelief, then studied them again. Finally he announced, "Your Honor, these two sets of fingerprints do not belong to the same man."

There was considerable consternation in the court. Mr. Gas Station jumped up screaming. He pointed to Ed, then to me, "If he isn't the one, it must be the other one!"

The Judge rapped for order and waited until the room was quiet. "May I remind you," he sighed, aiming his remarks at Mr. Gas Station, "that you and the four officers have all testified under oath that he (the Judge pointed to me) was not the man you arrested. You have exonerated him with your own testimony and the accused has been exonerated by the physical evidence of his fingerprints. I have no alternative. . . . Case dismissed."

Later, as Ed and I were driving home, I told him, "This has been a very nerve racking affair. I hope you've learned your lesson. Crime doesn't pay."

"I've been thinking about that. . . . You're right. I knocked off twelve gas stations and only netted four thousand dollars and we still haven't paid the lawyer. Of course, that was only six months work and it's tax free, but even extended over a year it would only amount to eight thousand. That's hardly enough for the two of us to live on decently. We're going to have to get into another line of work."

"What do you have in mind?"

"I thought we'd go to Florida for a few weeks vacation. Then, after we're rested, I have an idea about how we could rob a bank with a minimum of risk."

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